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THE LADDER OF GOD
AND OTHER SERMONS

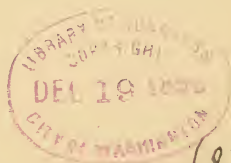


THE LADDER OF GOD

AND OTHER SERMONS

BY

KENNETH SYLVAN GUTHRIE, A.M. (HARV.), PH.D. (TUL.)



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K. S. GUTHRIE

TO HIM
WHOM I LOVE AS A FATHER,
WHOM I CHERISH AS A FRIEND,
AND WHOM I REVERE AS A SAINT,
THE REVEREND DOCTOR IN DIVINITY,
JOSEPH D. NEWLIN,
THESE DISCOURSES PREACHED IN
THE CHURCH OF THE INCARNATION
ARE DEDICATED.



CONTENTS.

Sermon.	Page.
I. The Ladder of God.....	1
II. The King's Beauty.....	10
III. The Beatitudes.....	16
IV. The Evolution of Conduct.....	23
V. The Parable of the Sower.....	32
VI. The Stars of God.....	39
VII. The Daily Bread.....	44
VIII. The House Built on a Rock.....	50
IX. The Patience of God.....	56
X. The Miracle of Feeding....	63
XI. Silence.....	68
XII. The Keys.....	75
XIII. Bochim.....	82

I.

THE LADDER OF GOD.

“And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it.”—Gen. xxviii: 10-22.

After his shameful crime, home was no place for Jacob. Rebekah felt that immediately; and as soon as convenient she sent him forth to Laban, her brother, both for protection and marriage. The whole affair must have broken like a thunderclap over the boy Jacob. Dwelling quietly at home, he must have expected to live there all his life,—and then suddenly, that deed of shame, urged by her whom he revered as mother; then the imminent danger of death by the hand of his brother, and then, the sudden change of his prospects in life, sneaking out of the camp, and travelling over the unknown fields of Palestine, alone, face to face with the inscrutable majesty of nature—we can imagine his excitement, and his terror. Cowed and wearied, he sank down by the roadside, near Luz, to wait for the morning. But as he slept, in the deep sleep of night, the veil of flesh was removed from his eyes for the moment, and he glanced deeper than usual into the spiritual realms within the universe, and he saw God.

We must now deal with (1) God's apparent reward to Jacob for his crime; (2) the place where the ladder appeared to Jacob, and (3) lastly the ladder of God.

I. In one sense, a very shallow sense, it seems as if God were rewarding Jacob for his crime. This of course is nonsense. God must be just, or He would not be God. But we must distinguish between human and divine punishment. Human punishment is revenge, more than anything else. For instance, a man commits a cold-blooded murder. The human manner of dealing with him is to execute the murderer, demanding eye for eye, ear for ear, tooth for tooth. This is mere revenge, for we give the murderer no opportunity of doing better. But the object of divine punishment is not revenge; it is amendment. Therefore, as soon as the criminal soul has determined to amend, Divine Justice is satisfied, although retribution must inexorably be fulfilled, later on. Jacob had to spend twenty years in exile, in labour and in sorrow, before he could return home. As soon as the soul has, however, determined to return homeward from its slough of sin, so soon does God draw near to the soul, announcing to it the fact that He has accepted its repentance, and that the latter end of the soul shall make it all well again. He grants such as encouragements to the soul in its upward way; lest it despair of ever returning home, after such grievous falls. God is always closest to those who need Him most, and His comfort comes perhaps more sensibly close to those who are just returning to Him than to the ninety and nine who are assured of His love, by former experience. They need nothing to assure them that to those who love God all joy shall be given by their Father. Consequently, we need not be anxious if sometimes it seems as if God had ceased to come close to our soul. There is no actual need of His appearance to us, whereas the stumbling sinner needs the Presence of God in some tangible conscious assurance. Therefore God appeared to penitent Jacob, in his hour of need.

II. Why did the Vision come to Jacob near Luz, and not somewhere else? Was the place particularly sacred? Had God promised to appear there more fully than He would elsewhere? No; for Jacob was there by the mere chance of travel, and Luz was a city of Philistines who presumably did not worship the God of Abraham. Why was this the very gate of Heaven?

Because Jacob himself was there.

God appears to man as much in one place as another; God would be as close to a saint of His if he were in Patagonia, as if he were in Greenland, in Palestine, or in the United States. Wherever the heart is repentant, and in need, there is love and help of God.

Although we can find God everywhere, there is for every one of us a particular Bethel, a particular gate of heaven; and that is our sleeping apartment, in which we may retire in privacy to communion with God. We may sleep in Bethel, in the house of God, every night.

We are told that man is the temple of God; and true is that saying. If we realized it more, we would treat our body with greater reverence, and would not expose it to so much frivolousness and meaningless foolishness as we do. We would not defile it by useless words which do not come from our hearts; we would show forth divine dignity in every action.

But it may be asked, how is our body a temple of God?

We may take as an example the fact that at one and the same moment it is possible for man to hear sounds, see light, and with hands feel the solidity of earthly things. There is a universe of sound of which man is conscious by means of his sense of hearing. We cannot see or feel sounds. Likewise, we exist in an universe of light which we can neither hear nor feel with the hand. And so forth. But because man has several senses so can

he at one and the same moment dwell in these three different universes.

In the same way, there are three universes that interpenetrate each other: matter, mind or intelligence, and spirit, of which three universes each man partakes by the means of his body, his mind and his spirit. Our common physical universe here we all share; the mental universe is here also inasmuch as we can understand each other, understanding the words we use in speaking to each other. Of the spiritual universe we are only conscious when God opens our spiritual vision, as he did to Jacob, with his head on the stones, outside of the city of Luz.

Thus, wherever a soul is in need and in sorrow, there is the love and mercy of God ready to bless and to comfort it. And that our spiritual vision may be opened by the teaching of our conscience is it that we pray to God, day and night.

These truths Mrs. Browning well knew:

“Earth’s crammed with heaven,
And every common bush afire with God:
But only he who sees takes off his shoes,
The rest sit round it and pluck blackberries,
And daub their natural faces unaware
More and more from the first similitude.”

Nor was Moore ignorant of them:

“At the mid hour of night, when stars are weeping, I fly
To the lone vale we loved when life shone warm in thine eye;
And I think if spirits can steal from the regions of air
To revisit past scenes of delight, thou wilt come to me there
And tell me our love is remembered even in the sky.
Then I sing the wild song it once was rapture to hear
When our voices commingling breathed like one on the ear;
And as echo far off through the vale my sad orison rolls,
I think, O my love, ’tis thy voice from the kingdom of Souls,
Faintly answering still the notes that once were so dear.”

III. When God shall open our spiritual vision, as He opened Jacob's, I believe that we will see what Jacob saw, a ladder resting on the ground, and reaching upward to the sky, reaching up to God Himself.

Perhaps many of us suppose that God has left His world long ago to take care of itself. Many of us suppose that we are living this life of ours as best we may, that it is a great mistake to think that God is still with us every moment and every hour in this world. Many of us think that, given the law of gravitation, and the law of the survival of the fittest, there is no good reason why we could not without further presence of God evolve a world much better than this one of ours. If our eyes were only open we would see that angels are ever ascending and descending the ladder between this world and God. There ascend the souls of those who have passed away, there ascend our prayers; there descend the souls of the children, and the angels sent to comfort, to inspire, to strengthen us. God is ever reaching out in infinite love to His wandering children. Ever is He sending us strength, and good thoughts, pure desires, and impulses of unselfish love.

This conception of a ladder between man and God has various lessons for us, besides that of an assured means of union between our imperfection and the full harmony of God.

In the first place, it shows us that it is possible for us to rise to the very highest sapphire wall, for we see in moments of clearness of vision the whole ladder, up to the very presence of God.

Then it shows us that we can rise to God only by the accomplishment of a definite number of particular actions or deeds. There is no hocus-pocus about the way we ascend Godward. It is not sufficient to go through some magical rite, some mysterious incantation by

which we are suddenly transported to heaven by an angelic balloon. No; the road to heaven consists of just so many definite, natural, explainable, and intelligible steps. Our upward labour is piece-work, not work by the day. You may take a whole lifetime about it, or you can do it speedily; but you cannot shirk any single step. Poor or rich, young or old, all can do this; and this piece-work is demanded of all. When you try to mount a ladder, you rise only by ascending definite steps, of which you can shirk no one; you rise by piece-work, not by magical wings.

Thirdly, the ladder is for our feet, not our heads. Some people imagine they can get to heaven by some single momentary act of faith or belief; leaving the body as sinful, as foul, as weak as ever. No; the whole body must rise too, if the head would. We can't reach heaven without a change in the morals and the direction of the life. The only solid advance for our souls is when our whole being changes; we can only rise on a ladder when the whole body ascends.

Fourthly, it takes some effort to go up the ladder; it is easy enough to fall down. As it is impossible to fall upward, we cannot rise heavenward without effort, without struggle, without sorrow, tears and prayers; but there is no difficulty in falling back earthward; nothing is necessary but to let go, and lie back comfortably. Consequently, we may know that if we are not making any effort, we are not rising heavenward, and are falling backward; for as yet no man has invented a process by which he can fall upwards without giving himself some effort. How many of us are leading a comfortable, careless life? How many of us are not rising at all?

Fifthly, we can only go up a ladder one step at a time; and if we do this, the other steps will take care of themselves. It is likewise in the spiritual life. It often hap-

pens that the devout soul is worried concerning the future. Will the dark cloud that hangs over the future be lifted? Will enough strength be given to fulfil some great step which is seen to be inevitable? Apply here the lesson of the ladder. There is only one way to reach the high rung; and that is to put the foot on the next higher one. And it is impossible to reach the highest rung except by placing the foot on the rungs between. So in the spiritual life. There is only one way of becoming strong enough to do the great distant duty, and that is to perform faithfully the small one next at hand. Conversely, it is impossible ever to fulfil the great distant duty except through the despised and insignificant duty of to-day. So may we all take courage in doing all that we should do to-day, and to-morrow; and God will bring the day after to pass.

Sixthly, when a man is going up a very tall ladder, when he is up about a third of the way, it almost seems as if one step did not bring him much nearer the top; and yet he does not stop climbing because he cannot see at each step just how much higher he is rising, for he knows that every step brings him just so much closer to the top, although he cannot see it plainly. Likewise in our life; the ladder of our life is so long that it almost seems as if one deed more or one deed less would not bring us closer to God. We think that among so many actions, one action by itself is worth nothing. But we know by faith that each single action brings us just so much closer to God, just as each time the sun sets, we are a day's march nearer home than we were in the morning. Each action, each thought counts just that much in our ascent to God.

Lastly, our ascent must be regular. Almost all of us have probably at some time in our lives gone up a tall, rickety ladder, and when far from the ground, have felt

very much inconvenienced if one rung was broken, or if two or three were missing. So in the spiritual life. Is it not strange how the same person goes to Church regularly during the winter, and never in summer? How during Advent and Lent there are short flare-ups of devotion, followed by long intervals of dormant torpitude?

Besides, what were the use of a ladder if it were perfect the whole way up, with the exception of just enough missing rungs not to be able to reach the next one above? What is the use of God's providential opportunities for sanctification for us in the future, if to-day we slide back just far enough not to be able to take to-morrow the all-important step which shall be the key of the whole future?

Again, what would you call him who would take one meal to-day, six to-morrow, twenty the day after, none for the next two weeks, sixteen the day after, two the next day, and nothing for the next month? And yet there are devout and earnest souls who in their comfortable self-conceit have not the slightest idea that they are fools, but who feed their souls just as irregularly.

Regularity in the revolution of the sun, the moon, the stars, the ministration of angels, and the care of the body are the essentials of our life here; and so does the growth of our souls demand that every daily opportunity for prayer, for development, for infiltration of divine love, shall be embraced, since each opportunity lost is gone forever, and can never, never be made up for. Only with such regularity can our nature grow rounded, and avoiding the one-sidedness of those whom we call so aptly "cranks," develop into the fulness of the measure of the stature of the Christ, the sanest, the kindest, the gentlest, the most harmonious of our ideals.

Josiah Gilbert Holland well says:

“Heaven is not reached at a single bound,
But we build the ladder by which we rise
From the lowly earth to the vaulted skies,
And we mount to its summit, round by round.
I count this thing to be grandly true:
That a noble deed is a step toward God—
Lifting the soul from the common clod
To a purer air and a broader view.
We hope, we aspire, we resolve, we trust,
When the morning calls us to life and light,
But our hearts grow weary, and ere the night,
Our lives are trailing the sordid dust.
Wings for the angel, but feet for men!
We may borrow the wings to find the way—
We may hope and resolve and aspire and pray;
But our feet must rise, or we fall again.
Heaven is not reached at a single bound;
But we build the ladder by which we rise
From the lowly earth to the vaulted skies,
And we mount to its summit, round by round.”

And what shall we see at the top of the ladder?
The ineffable beatific vision of the King in His Beauty.

That is the end of our lives, to attain to the presence
of God Himself. God grant that we may all of us attain
it.

II.

THE KING'S BEAUTY.

"Thine eyes shall see the King in his beauty."—Isa. xxxiii:17.

It is very, very strange, my beloved, that the great proofs for the existence of God which have been advanced in the past all hinged on the fact that God is Thought, or Being, or Justice, or Love. Doubtless, when we have reached the conception that God is Love, we have reached one of the highest and most sublime conceptions of which a man is capable. And yet, there is an equally high and sublime conception most of us forget; namely, that God is Beauty.

Just as all love begins and ends in God, so does all beauty begin and end in Him. Wherever we see the faintest indication of Love, there we reverently step aside—for we know that there abides the Shekinah of the Most High. And we forget that where we see the faintest indication of beauty, there we should be silent and uncover our heads—for there too abides the Divine Presence.

And I think that if we reflected carefully for a few moments, we would see that the reason why all hearts turn instinctively towards God is that He is the greatest beauty that man is able to know, although there must be infinite abysses of beauty infinitely too deep for man ever to sound them. Those who by personal, inner communion with God have beheld even the face of an

angel have forgotten all other beauty they may have witnessed before; for the beauty of purity and love is such that the human heart loses itself in an ecstasy at sight of it.

God is then the First Beautiful, the source and end of all other beauty; that of which all else is but an image.

II. There are but few souls who are privileged with an inner direct communion with God. These are deprived of the greatest beauty which they are capable of knowing. Yet God has not left them comfortless; the Universe we see, that in some sense may be called a vesture, a garment, a veil of God, reveals a faint impress of His image.

Nor need we deplore that this image of God is so little like God that we may not recognize God from His image. For Athanasius makes this the great point of his polemic against the heathen, that the world, namely, Nature, is such a good likeness of God, that anyone who contemplates it carefully and lovingly will be led to know God. This likeness is so good, that no man can plead any excuse whatsoever for remaining in the darkness of doubt about Him. Within each of us is the road by which, through contemplation of the Divine Image called Nature, we may recognize the features of God Himself.

For this reason, I think, cities are sad places for children to grow up in. They are thus deprived of a birthright, inherent in every heart, of coming to know God by the contemplation of Nature. And if God's providence has indicated to us that we must live in cities, where we can only see a piece of the sky as large as a man's hand through smoke and noise, then we should as religiously as we go to Church, take moments of leisure and go to the forest or wild mountain, where we may from time to time catch glimpses of the living voice of God.

Picture to yourself some mountain you know; some Niagara, some Ocean-beach, some virgin forest, a hundred miles from any city; some valley hidden in the mountain-fastnesses; picture to yourself a golden sunrise, or a purple sunset; picture to yourself the ineffable beauty of the stars; picture to yourself any of these common objects; or, merely look at the blue of the sky at day-time; and then tell me, if you can think of anything more beautiful. Do you not see a majesty, a calmness, a glory that reminds you of the beauty of God?

There is so much beauty, if we would but look at it! Every merchant's store is full of beautiful objects which we can admire without buying, if we are too poor. Wherever you go, there is some tree, some strip of sky, some dozen stars which we can see, even in the heart of the city. Oh, how much beauty we waste, day by day! I think that this is the saddest of all sad things for those who have reached a certain age; that they have wasted so many thoughts of beauty, and beautiful thoughts! And therefore I think it is the duty of all those who have the guardianship over children, to teach the child to look up, and to admire and reverence Nature.

I think that this is the sin of those who whip horses, and who catch flies to tear out their wings. It is a direct insult to the image of God in that object; a diabolical instinct of making ugly, of disgracing the natural beauty of God Himself.

I think that this is the very saddest thing about the introduction of electric street-cars; that we see so many less horses. Each horse, each dog, each cow is perfectly beautiful if we will but stop to notice it. There is nothing so small that does not show forth the beauty of God, from the sparrow and canary, to the little common house-fly.

III. Thus we have seen that there are two things which are present everywhere, and which may be called the most beautiful things; God, and the World. But there is a third.

Did I not say that the city was a sad place to live in, because there we were deprived of the beauty of Nature? Yes, it is sad; but it is sublime; for in the city we see more than in the country the Third Most Beautiful thing in existence, Man.

Yes, there is no more sublime occupation than standing still at a busy crossing, seeking to recognize the beauty of God in the faces that come and go. That is the true human *Sursum Corda*, when the heart is lifted not to the clouds, but to heaven; beholding the infinite variety of the thoughts of God, and seeing the dignity of each separate and individual human soul.

Do you say that some faces have no beauty at all? You are mistaken. There is not a single soul that has ever lived that was not beautiful; but each was beautiful with its own beauty. The maid and the matron, the youth and the man, each are beautiful with their own beauty. The young woman who seeks to keep her youthful beauty by cosmetics is a fool; for she is just as beautiful in the beauty of a matron as she could ever be in that of a maid. Greatest of all, even beyond that of a child, is the beauty of the aged woman and man; for that is the time when the human face expresses more nearly the divine and disinterested love of God, and the feeling of Fatherhood and Motherhood at last shines through this veil of flesh. Greatest of all, is the soul that has seen God; young or old, cripple or whole. And I wonder not that artists have painted the Virgin Mary and the saints of old with halos around their heads; for I have seen many faces in my day, around which I believe to have seen the calm glow of the Divine Light.

I often hear people say: Oh, when shall I be delivered from this ugly awkward body? and I feel like answering: Oh, how long will you be given by God the privilege of dwelling in this beautiful human body of yours, this perfect expressor of your thoughts, which you can make the temple of the Holy Ghost?

How shall we make our temples—for I will not call them only bodies—more beautiful? Not by cosmetics, or garments of harmonizing colours; but by expressing through them beautiful thoughts; thoughts of love in healing the sick and assisting the poor; thoughts of glory ineffable, by learning to perform beautiful harmonious music; thoughts of universal broadness, by memorizing the great thoughts of the great souls of all ages, in prose or poetry, and letting them vibrate on every chord of one's nature, until they shall be part of one's being, and the soul shall be glorified. Oh, teach children beautiful poetry; they will never forget it!

And if children be taught beauty in early years, in their more mature age they will even imitate God's creative power, and compose music, paint great paintings, and write poetry. Sad is the history of that soul that has never exercised that divine prerogative of creation, of giving from oneself beauty, just as the ecstasy of God is that He gives away His beauty to all who can receive it. None who has once felt the divine rapture of creation, can ever forget it to all eternity.

But above and beyond all this, there is still a surer and shorter means of beautifying our temples. Just as the City of Washington, D. C., is only important to the United States because the Government is there, so no human temple is of any importance to the world unless God, the Governor of all things, abide in it. Do you want to beautify your body? Let God dwell in it; let the shadow of His presence brood over the anguish of

your life; open yourself to Him, and He will come, never, never, to depart. This, this is the marriage of the soul to her God.

Do you ask why so few people find beauty, if it is true that it is so close to us as not even to be near?

I will answer this question if you will answer my questions. Tell me why musicians and artists are so often said to lead bad lives? Why do men and women seek to remain young, or to be considered young? God knows; and may God have mercy on those who mistake passion for the divine instinct for beauty.

These are the three greatest, most beautiful things; God, Nature, and Man; how beautiful they are; how they are everywhere if we will but lift up our eyes to look at them; how divine they are, Nature, Man, and God!

III.

THE BEATITUDES.

S. Matt. v: 3-12.

When Israel had just entered the Promised Land, Joshua, according to the promise made to Moses, commanded half the people to stand upon Mount Ebal, and half the people to stand upon Mount Gerizim, and to answer Amen to the Curses which the sons of Levi pronounced. The last of them was in this wise: Cursed be he who confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them. And all the people said, Amen. (Deut. xxvii: 26.)

When Jesus began his ministry, and had just chosen His disciples, He preached on a mountain near Capernaum, with great crowds of people flocking around Him.

And He opened His mouth to utter the Beatitudes.

The difference between the two events is striking. In one case the people were bound to perform the law by curses; in the other, the teaching was recommended to the hearts of the people by the fact that it began by invoking blessings upon them.

This fact is, moreover, characteristic of all the teachings of Jesus. His message was the Evangel, the good message, the tidings of great joy, the good news. He came that we might have life. How deeply this impressed the disciples may even be inferred from the fact that the teachings of Jesus were called the Gospel on this very account, that they were tidings of so great joy; the

great consciousness that God is so loving that He seeks to reach us if we will only let Him bless us. Man need not strive, and struggle, and cry, for God comes down to man, if man will but not interfere with God's work, in him.

I desire to notice the application of this positivity of the Gospel in the realms of Metaphysics, Theology, and the Practical Life.

I. Let us consider, first, the bearing which this practical Gospel has on our Metaphysical world.

A man can only give that which he possesses. If I am a pauper, I cannot give you a gift of a million dollars. Likewise, Jesus could only bless with the blessings which He had. He must have possessed the blessings in order to give them. Both God and Man can only give of their own; so God blesses, and the natural Man curses; but the Man who is in the likeness of God will also bless.

That God blesses means that God is full of all blessings. Blessings are all that is good; and what is good is reality.

God is all existence. There is or exists nothing out of Him. All that exists, is so far in Him. Still things that exist, the earth, the moon, the sun, and the stars, all are part of Him; but above all that we can think, all that we can feel, all that we can know, is He in His personal being, in oceans of unapproachable light. The Universe, and all that our sense can know is only the husk of God, so to speak. And this is matter, the husk of spirit, the lowest form of existence, but, in as far as it is existence, in God, and part of God.

Evil then does not exist. The opposite of existence is non-existence—and non-existence does not exist. Evil exists only inasmuch as a conscious being thinks of it. Refuse to recognize it, and it ceases to exist. But what

we call evil, in our lives, is only a lower form of good. In such a sense we are evil before God, because we are of a lower form of Good than His nature.

The consequence is, that man knows evil with certainty, and only knows of good by faith. God knows actually that there is nothing but good, and looking down upon us, can only see the good in and around us. So, the divine man, who has grown into the image and likeness of God, knows for certain that the kernel of the Universe is eternal good and love; and looking on man, knows the good that is in him certainly, and can only see in what we call evil a transitional stage from a lower to higher form of being.

On this touchstone every man is tried. If he knows for certain that good is the foundation and end of our lives, it is a proof he has entered beyond the husks of existence. If, again, his only certainty is that there is evil, sorrow and pain in this world, then it proves his eyes have never beheld the furthest image of God; just as when a person has never seen any of the stars in heaven, we know that he is short-sighted.

II. I want to notice, in the second place, the theological bearing of this philosophy.

The kingdom of God and the kingdom of this world are in sharp contradistinction. You cannot serve God and Mammon; either you will serve God, or you will serve Mammon; for their commands are contradictory one to another.

God says: Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Mammon says: Blessed are those who know how to get along here, for theirs is the kingdom of earth, whatever happens hereafter; a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.

God says: Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted. Mammon says: Blessed are they

that have a good time, for they do not need to be comforted.

God says: Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Mammon says: Blessed are the enterprising, for they do not need to wait to inherit the earth, it is theirs already.

God says: Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled. Mammon says: Blessed are they that do not worry themselves about righteousness, for they will not need to be filled.

God says: Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. Mammon says: Blessed are they who draw interest and dividend regularly, even if the household goods of the poor have to be sold.

God says: Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Mammon says: Blessed are those who know how to be agreeable in social intercourse, for they shall be invited to all balls and receptions, and shall see Society.

God says: Blessed are the peace-makers; for they shall be called the children of God. Mammon says: Blessed are the lawyers, for their deposits in bank grow large.

God says: Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake. Mammon says: Blessed is the politician who is the intimate friend of everybody, who has kissed every baby in his district, and who cannot be quoted on any side of any question, or can be quoted, like Gladstone, on every side of every question that has arisen within the last twenty years.

God says: Turn your cheek to the smiter; Mammon says: Hit back every time.

Mammon says: Enjoy the world; God says: Live so that you may see God.

You cannot serve both God and Mammon; but you choose; voluntarily, or subconsciously.

III. I want to notice, in the third place, the application of this principle to practical life; and that means, firstly, to the world in general, then to the neighbour, and lastly, to one's self.

(1) The world is full of evil, if you look for it. There are saloons at every corner, there are gambling-houses, and a thousand gates to hell. The newspapers are full of them, if you look. Corruption, fraud, bribery, deceit, theft, and a thousand other nameless crimes abound.

But for every gate of hell, God has put ten gates of Heaven. There is the lovely sunshine, the colours of the sunrise and sunset, the stars, the fields, the rivers, the ocean. Then there are Churches, and better still, a thousand sweet homes in which the light of the Spirit shines. There are hearts who have had deeper visions than you or I think possible. God meets us everywhere, knocks everywhere, shines everywhere.

Now, why do you and I see all the evil and none of the good? Firstly, because we are self-conceited. It amuses us to see people so much worse than we are. We are lenient to the criminal, because he makes us feel how good we are. It amuses us by no means to see people who are better than we are; and when we meet them, and recognize their superiority over us, we make the excuse that we are better than they in some other particular.

But secondly, we see evil because we are evil. Have you never noticed how it is usual to learn a great deal about a thing immediately we have become acquainted with it? As soon as we learn the name of a town, we see it everywhere. And beneath this observation there is a psychological truth; attention is conditioned by interest; that is why the congregation goes to sleep during the sermon, and no College Student ever goes to sleep

while a foot-ball game is going on. The reason, therefore, that we see evil is that we are interested in it. Therefore Jesus never saw evil in the world, for He had no interest in it.

If then you complain that the world is evil, and that the times are going mad, you may know the fault is in yourself.

(2) Our neighbors are all, in our estimation, less right than we are ourselves. If we should cut out from our conversation everything that referred to the evil we saw in our neighbours, people would be very much bored at receptions. If, you, as Jesus, refuse to recognize the contradiction of sinners, you are not likely to find any evil in them.

If you greet every neighbour of yours with a smile and a kind word, as Jesus began His Sermon on the Mount with benedictions, you will be surprised to find how many smiles and kind words you will get from the very crustiest.

(3) But in respect to ourselves, the application of this principle of life will be of great value.

Do not spend all your energies avoiding the evil, but believe that the heart of the Universe is good, and that your destiny is divine, and you will get self-assurance in the struggle, you will learn to trust yourself to the good Father God and His Christ. And by the might of that faith, that "Thine" and not the Devil's is the Kingdom, we shall defy the Devil and all his hosts, so to speak; which means, that you will grow stronger, purer, and better.

Then, as our eyes shall become purer, we shall see God Himself around us, and we shall not faint under the burdens of life; for, in the words of the Psalmist, every one of us had fainted, unless we had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in this desolate land, which we by mistake call the "land of the living."

Blessed be the poor in spirit; blessed be they that mourn; blessed be the meek; blessed be they which hunger and thirst after righteousness; blessed be the merciful; blessed be the pure in heart; blessed be the peacemakers; and, above and beyond, and beneath all this, blessed be our Father and our God!

IV.

THE EVOLUTION OF CONDUCT.

"For we know in part, and prophesy in part: . . . For now we see in a mirror, darkly; but then face to face: . . . But now abideth faith, hope, love, these three; and the greatest of these is love."—1 Cor. xiii: 9-13.

If an intelligence from some other part of the Universe should determine to visit the Earth for one single day, the spectacle presented to it would indeed be strange. There would appear to exist on earth a number of different kinds of human beings, some full-grown, some half-grown, some yet in their cradles. These would appear to be separate races, every one of them different from every other one. Each would appear to be quite distinct, and separated by an impassable gulf from every other one. There would be no indication to point out that the child would finally grow into the youth, and the youth finally into the man. On the contrary, they would appear to be distinct races which could not by any manner of means merge into the other. From dawn to dusk, the closest scrutiny could not detect the slightest change, and could not reveal aught but a multitude of different races of human beings of differing sizes.

This supposition is not very far-fetched. Every child looks upon the world in just this way until he is told that he himself will some day be as full-grown as any man he sees, or until sufficient observation brings this truth home to him.

If this foreign intelligence should remain on earth for forty years, at least, it would see that the spectacle which astonished it at the start was very natural. At any one moment, there coexist a number of human beings at different stages of physical development; which, in their own time, will yield to succeeding stages, so that every human being passes through all of the stages of life, from childhood, through youth, manhood, and age.

The change is however so gradual, that during one day, that is, for one space of light between two spaces of darkness, all human beings appear to remain at the same stage of growth, being and remaining distinct and separate.

When we spoke of four ages through which every human being developed normally, we were inexact in our phraseology. There are not four ages; there are as many as there are days through which the human being lives.

The change is regular and very gradual, and if we choose four ages, we choose these particular four only for the sake of convenience, as being four very representative times of life.

In all this that we have said, we have faintly portrayed the cycle of physical growth which every human being reveals in its existence on earth. Let us apply this, as far as we can, to the growth of our souls.

When we look around at the souls about us, we are struck with the amazing difference that obtains among them. We are not here referring to the differences of disposition, but to the differences of development.

The Children of Israel were all of one family; yet, they were divided into twelve separate and distinct tribes; equal one to the other both in dignity and attainments, yet totally different in characteristics, as we easily gather from the separate blessings which Israel, on his deathbed, bestowed on the twelve Patriarchs. We

are the spiritual Israel, and like them we all belong to one family. Yet there are among us different tribes, equal the one to the other both in dignity and attainments, but totally different in characteristics. So we expect that every one of our brethren will be different in disposition from his brother, although equal in dignity and attainments. But the difference which obtains between souls is not so much one of quality as one of quantity; of development; of perfectness; of purification. There have always been materialists and altruists in the world. The materialists, and also the altruists consider their own view of life the exclusively true one; and many times, the closest scrutiny reveals no change, in the whole life; further than that natural to the times of life; many a materialist remains a materialist to his dying day; many an altruist remains an altruist to his dying day; materialists and altruists seem to belong to different races, which could never merge or change.

While this present life is the only opportunity of purification of which we are absolutely certain, there are doubtless other periods of progressive sanctification.

The reasons for such a belief, if it be no more than a belief, we cannot give here, from lack of space, so that we shall assume that every soul has opportunities of sanctification until it be quite perfect.

If then we could glance at all the periods of purification of one particular soul, the whole apparent difficulty would be solved. At any one moment, a number of souls coexist at different stages of spiritual development, which stages, in their own time, yield to each succeeding stage, so that every soul passes through all the stages of spiritual development, from materialism to altruism, and from altruism to consciousness of the Divine presence.

The change is however so gradual, that during our life, most souls seem to remain at the same stage of development, being and remaining distinct and separate.

Reflection will lead us to qualify this statement. The growth of the body is remorseless and inexorable. You can neither change nor delay physical growth as long as food and shelter are satisfactory. The growth of the soul, on the contrary, can be hastened or delayed. The soul possesses self-consciousness, and may, by earnest endeavour, hasten its development through any one stage. While some souls, during this life, do not seem to change their stand-point at all, others clearly show marks of satisfactory development. Many men are conscious, from time to time, of a change of moral stand-point, in which the higher invariably succeeds the lower stage. And it is from such regularity of development, that we assume that if we could see all the stages of purification, we would see that each soul in its own time passes through the different stages of development. For all souls are equal, and in order to attain equal crowns must endure equal trials.

There are as many stages of spiritual development as there are trials which the soul must endure before it becomes perfect. The change is regular and gradual, so that if we choose four stand-points of the moral life, we choose these particular four only for the sake of convenience, and because they are eminently representative stages of soul-development. They are the childhood, youth, manhood and age of the soul; they are, first, passion; second, material selfishness; third, spiritual selfishness; and fourth, devotion to the divine Will.

In order to grasp this conception, it will assist us materially if we compare the life of souls in this world to the attendance of a youth at College. The College course embraces four years; the Freshman; the So-

phomore, the Junior, and the Senior. In her Freshman year, the soul is given up to her passions, and she is forced to stand examinations until she is promoted to the Sophomore year, having fully understood that passion is not all of life. In her Sophomore year, the soul embraces material selfishness, and she is forced to stand examinations until she is promoted to the Junior year, having learnt, once for all, that such material selfishness is only a small part of her ideal. In her Junior year, the soul becomes selfish in spiritual matters, and she is forced to stand examinations until she is promoted to the Senior year, having learnt, once for all, that she cannot rest in any form of selfishness. In her Senior year, the soul learns that the purpose of her life is not to be saved or to save others, but to do the Will of God. If she stands all her examinations satisfactorily . . . and God does not leave her alone until she have stood them creditably then she receives the crown of life, and comes into the immediate presence of her Lord and Master, her Friend and Father.

In a College of learning, if a student fails in his examinations for two years, he is usually dismissed. There is not, however, I love to believe, such a thing as failure in the College of Life. Our Father loves each soul with a love so tender that He will not let it fail, but keeps it at it until it succeeds. The only thing the student has to determine is how quickly or how slowly he will go through the course.

Let this much be said concerning the idea of progression. Let us now turn to examine closely the curriculum of the different years of the College of Life.

The curriculum of the Freshman year is purity of all the senses. The stand-point of the soul was passion, however much learning, refinement, and culture the soul may have been privileged to acquire. Every

action of the soul proceeded consciously or unconsciously from the desire of enjoying the gratification of the senses. During the greater part of the Freshman year the soul is a slave to its lusts, to the lust of drink, of anger, of hearing, or seeing, or touching. And though the soul was at times conscious of being a miserable and contemptible slave, the blessed Father in heaven did not diminish His love for her, but wrestled with her by day and by night until she stood the final examination of resisting lusts satisfactorily, and was promoted to the Sophomore year.

A great number of souls that are on earth at the present time are still in their Freshman year. Grant God they may soon be promoted!

The curriculum of the Sophomore year is faith. The stand-point of the soul is material selfishness. The soul has once for all abandoned the stand-point of passion, and now desires all the material goods which it can bring together. Many sophomore souls are in appearance freshmen and junior souls; but their true rank can always be discerned by noticing whether or not the end of their actions is anything which is good in the eyes of this world; riches, rank, fortune, fame, good report, and all the comforts of wealth. Painting, drawing, music and poetry are at times found here, although these arts have all the tendency to make the final examination of this year easier. There are many artists who pursue their arts for the sake of the glory, of the fame and fortune. In their case, however, painting, music and poetry drag the sophomore soul back into the Freshman year of passion, so that art in itself need not be an unmixed good. There is no doubt that it is a very valuable means of "waking" the soul to the spiritual world around her; but at the same time it may let the sentiments degenerate into passions; and the soul

that has fallen back when its eyes were open, is in a very much worse plight than if it had never risen. For when the eyes are opened to the spiritual world, the soul will see the evil which it felt but could not see before; so that the powers of evil have no longer an indirect, but a direct hold over the struggling soul. I said that the curriculum of the Sophomore year was faith. When a soul still dwells in the material world, she cannot lay hold of the truths of the spiritual world by any other means than that of reasonable faith; the soul still is childish; she acts, thinks, and feels as a child; she can only see as through a glass darkly; she must guess, trust and believe much in order to keep close to the truths of religion. If the sophomore soul then clings to the truths of religion by mere intellectual faith, if she be not capable of more than this, the time will come when she will be able to read the infinite depths of truths which the deepening vision will discern therein. So that faith, even blind faith, if necessary, is a good for the sophomore soul, in order to wean her, if possible, from the goods of the external world.

The curriculum of the Junior year is hope. The stand-point of the soul is spiritual selfishness. The spiritual eyes and the spiritual ears have been opened to the realities beyond this world of matter, to the realm of the angels. The soul sees that only spiritual good is lasting and valuable. Therefore she tries "to be saved," to "go to heaven;" she strains every nerve, by drills, exercises and vigils and fasts, to conquer her road to God, in spite of the devil and all his angels, . . . and, alas, almost in spite of God Himself. This is the standpoint of the Buddhists, Theosophists, Occultists, or Christian Scientists, who are determined to storm heaven, and whose attainments are so wonderful—and they appear wonderful at times—that the Gods in the

heaven of Indra are, by Kalidasa, represented as trembling before them. But, when it is all taken in its best light, it is little else than the most intense selfishness that human brains could devise. If spiritual things are more valuable than material things, then selfishness in spiritual things is more intensely selfish than selfishness in material things; and selfishness is the reverse of Divine. Spiritual pride and conceit abound here; every soul is the Messiah of the world, although he be not received by anybody else than himself. The higher the souls rise, the greater distance can they fall; and therefore the dangers of the quicksands of the selfishness of the Junior year are infinitely more dangerous than any former dangers. Love alone can point to the narrow hidden path of safety. And hope is needed to seek something higher than what seems highest; to seek salvation by yielding up the hope of it.

The curriculum of the Senior year is love. It is spiritual unselfishness; when the soul is so transported at the infinite beauty and love of the Master that she is willing to lay aside even the hope of salvation in order to lay herself down in His pierced hand, that she may learn to do His will, and His will alone.

There are few souls that ever reach the Senior year within our own narrow sphere of common observation.

By the time that a soul reaches the Senior class, she speaks a new language. The words of Thomas a Kempis, Tauler, Fenelon, de Molinos, S. Teresa, S. Bernard of Clairvaux, are rubbish and bosh to the Sophomore soul; and much more so to those who are yet in the Freshman class. And yet they are palpitating with divine life, light, and love to those who know how to read their infinite depths.

The curriculum of the Senior year is love. God is love; and the more God-like we become, the more loving we become.

After the final examination we receive the crown of life, and see the Master face to face. Where, how, when, this final examination takes place for each individual soul, God alone knows. But the redemption of the Man of Sorrows assures us that we too shall grow up into all the fulness of the measure of the stature of Christ.

Beloved, each of your souls, and my soul, is in one of these classes. You alone and I alone can tell in which; for we alone know whether the present criterion of our lives is comfort and gratification, or the approval of the world, or the salvation of our souls, or the fulfilling of the divine Will. God have mercy on us, indeed, and give us purity, and faith, and hope, and love; God grant us soon His peace, that strengthens, and calms, and purifies.

“For we know in part, and prophesy in part: but when that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall be done away. When I was a child, I spake as a child, I felt as a child, I thought as a child: now that I am become a man, I have put away childish things. For now we see in a mirror darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I have been known. But now abideth faith, hope, love, these three; and the greatest of these is love.”

“For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us” (Rom. viii: 18).

V.

THE SOWER.

S. Matt. xiii: 3-9; 18-23. S. Mark iv: 1-20. S. Luke viii: 4-15.

Of all the Parables of the New Testament, this Parable of the Sower is one of the most important. It is usually reckoned that there are thirty-eight Parables in the New Testament; of these twenty-nine are recorded by one evangelist, three by two, and six by three, this Parable of the Sower being one of the latter six. It must have evidently impressed all of the evangelists very much, and must have meant a great deal to them, or they would not all have recorded it. Let us see how much it can mean to us.

I. We must, in the first place, inquire as to the meaning of the Parable.

We are told that the seed fell on the wayside, on stony ground, among thistles, as well as on good ground. No sower is so careless of his seed to-day, apparently. The reason of this carelessness is that in Judea it was customary to sow seed by placing it in a bag perforated with holes, placed on the back of an ass, who was driven up and down the field, so that the natural jolting of his step would spread the seed out around him.

The first point I want to make is that the seed was scattered broadcast irrespective of the kind of ground. The seed was not only sown on good ground, but on all kinds of ground: good, bad, and indifferent.

The application of this point is as follows. God scatters His benefits on all men, because they are men, whether they be good, bad, or indifferent. Just as God sends His physical sunlight on the just and the unjust, so He pours floods of true, intelligible, real spiritual sunlight from the Sun of Righteousness on all men, just and unjust.

With God, there is no such thing as respect of persons. He loves all. He seeks all with the same desire of His Father-heart. No one soul has a greater chance of appropriating His intelligible light than any other. His seed of love is thrown everywhere.

The second point I want to make is the reason why equal fruit did not spring up everywhere. The only reason was the condition of the ground. The way-side was so hard that it remained on the surface, until birds of the air picked it up; and the spiritual life which was destined to bring forth fruit to the earth strengthened the fowls of the air who are enemies to the fruitfulness of the ground. The stony places would not admit of any seed striking root; and the sun withered the tender shoot. The thorny places choked the seed, and did not permit air or sunshine to reach the growing stem of wheat. The good ground was good only because it was perfectly receptive of the seed, and permitted the seed to strike root into itself, to draw from itself all its nourishing juices, and to cover it up so no air or sunlight could reach it.

The reason why equal fruit did not spring up everywhere was the receptivity of the ground. The limit of the fruitfulness of the ground was not the amount of seed sown upon it, but the amount of cultivation bestowed upon it.

This leads to the third point. The wayside, and the stony ground, and the thorn-patch could have been made as fruitful as the ground which yielded a hundred-fold; all that was necessary was cultivation, care, and ma-

nuring. If the ground which yielded a hundred-fold had been left to itself for a few years, it would have become thorny, stony, and as hard as the way-side.

Why does the grace of God bear an hundred-fold in the heart of one man, and nothing at all in the heart of some other man? The same amount of seed has been sown; but the hearts of both are not equally ready to receive the seed given to both. What is the sinner to do if he desires to become a saint? Not to ask God to sow more seed in his heart, but to make his heart more unselfishly receptive of it. The goodness of the ground which bore an hundred-fold was its receptiveness; the goodness of a heart that is pure is its receptiveness of the light of God. The badness of the wayside was its imperviousness to the seed; the badness of the heart of a criminal is its imperviousness to the light of God. What then is the difference between the heart of the sinner and the saint? One is impervious, the other is receptive to the light of God. How shall the heart of the sinner become saintly? By becoming more receptive to the light of God. This is my third point; in order to make my heart evil, I only have to make it impervious to the intelligible light; in order to make my heart good, I only have to open it up; and God's seed of intelligible light will enter, and strike root, and then the human breast will become the temple of God, and God will dwell once more among the children of men.

All this seems self-evident enough, we say. But when we speak of "opening" the heart, it is not so clear just what is meant by this figure. How shall our hearts be opened?

If we return for a few moments to the Parable, we shall notice how the ground was prepared for the seed. Firstly, the ox trampled the flowers and weeds. Secondly, the plow reached down deep into the heart of the earth. Thirdly, the seed had to be harrowed over.

Firstly, the ox trampled the ground. If any of you have walked in the fields just before the time of sowing, after the land has lain fallow for many months, especially in fruitful countries such as Palestine, you would have noticed what a luxuriant crop of grasses and flowers had grown up of their own accord. Thorns, immense bushes of thorns, would have had time to grow and to bloom. Think how the ground must have been humiliated to feel the flowering thorns of which it was so proud, cut and trampled down! How the good ground must have envied those patches near the fence which were not thought worth cultivating, and which still gloried in all their luxuriant vegetation! The delicate field-flowers of the East, the tender green grasses with their veined leaves and plumed crest—all this ruthlessly trampled down, without consideration, or compassion.

But the trampling was not the worst part of it; if it had been trampled by a horse, or a man, or by something noble, the ground would not have cared so much. If the people who took our money, who trampled on our best efforts, were refined, gentlemanly, sensible, who would know how to use the money or the advantage taken from us nobly, it would not be so bad. But to have an ox, a stupid, lumbering, hulking ox, who ate nothing but hay, and was always going over and over the same ground, and knew no better, to trample down the sweetest flowers we had ever been able to produce—ah, that is hard indeed! The ox does not even notice the flowers of our life on which he tramples! The money that is taken from us goes to swell the coffers of those who do not need it, and to whom it is so small a sum, they do not even use it for self-gratification, while it was all we had to live on, and to enjoy!

Does not this seem evil enough? Can we imagine any greater misfortune? Ah, yes; the iron must yet enter

our heart. The cold, glittering steel must noiselessly pass through the midst of our life; the plow must cast the furrow.

Firstly, the plow casts the furrow noiselessly. We would not object if, when we knew we were to lose all, we might lose it all in some great catastrophe of which all the world should hear; if the telegraph should announce our misfortunes everywhere! But, alas, nobody notices us. Like a ship at sea which goes down into eternal silence, so do we simply drop out of notice, into darkness and silence. Nobody knows or hears we are an unsuccessful hero, and inglorious martyr—and to the end of our days we tell to our acquaintances how great we used to be.

Secondly, the inmost recesses of the ground are entered by the deaf, dumb, brutal, cruel steel. Cries, prayers, entreaties, are in vain; nothing will stop the bitterness, the diabolical agony. We cry out that there is no God! Oh, the nights of agonies and tears, the useless, helpless prayers and sighs!

But this is not all! Thirdly, the very inmost recesses of the heart are thrown up to the light, to the public gaze. Our most sacred convictions are the laughing-stock of the world. The poor woman has lost her husband; she must work for a living; she must sew early and late, till her heart is weary, and her eyes inflamed and burning. She has no more time for her spiritual life; and if on Sundays she catch a few moments of sleep, this is her greatest prayer. She has no time to be good; her companions are poor and degraded; the whole world beholds the torn depths of her heart, and these, her most sacred dreams, are trodden under the foot of the plowman, who remorselessly follows the plow.

Ah, how that plowed ground envies the patch that has been left to grow up with those beautiful, stately thorns, covered with many-coloured blooms! Oh, how that poor

woman envies—nay, worships the feet of those who stand near her, in wealth, in riches, in ornaments, in happiness, in peace, in amusement, in laughter! Oh, how she weeps her eyes out at the very thought of the lot of the happy! And I wonder what she would think if she knew the truth of it all! If she knew!

But she does not know. Not only has the ox trampled the flowers, not only has the plow thrown the furrow high—not only this; but the hard, ugly-looking, foreign seed is harrowed into her heart until in spite of herself that ugly thing has become a part of herself.

She no more repines; for she has given up the hope of life. She has given up the hope of preserving her individuality. She is ready to die; she waits impatiently till the angel of death shall come to free her from this barren bitterness. She has become stupefied, bewildered, senseless, having only enough power left to exist, to exist until death shall free her from earth.

And then?

And then, one morning she wakes to the presence of God—no, not out of the world, but in it! A new world has opened to her; she is born into the kingdom of heaven. On her couch she can hear the song of the Angels of Bethlehem, Glory be to God in the highest, Peace and Good-will to men! Then, she brings forth the fruit of good works; her words and deeds feed, clothe and comfort the wandering children of God; she brings forth Christ in her breast—and now, she thanks God for her pain.

Does the cultivated ground still envy the thorn-patch? Not it! The thorn-patch has its divinest pity and compassion.

Now, my beloved, let us ask ourselves the difference between the first and last condition of that woman's heart. As long as it was hard and self-conceited, it could not even admit to itself the Divine seed. It only became

fruitful when it became passive and obedient to the influence of the plow and the seed; for that plow would have passed over and over the same ground until that earth was properly soft enough to receive and nourish the seed; and as soon as the plowman saw the earth was soft enough, he stopped passing the plow through it. So is it, my beloved, with God's plow in that woman's heart. For its own sake that heart must be made soft enough to admit the Divine intelligible light. Until that heart is passive enough, it must be plowed over and over; but as soon as it is passive enough, the Divine plowman will stop; but not before.

Why not then, my beloved, hasten the process? It is true that the earth cannot become broken up of its own accord; but we who are rational creatures, can fall on our knees, and by ceaseless prayer prepare for the Advent of the Christ-Child in our hearts. For prayer, and purity, and love will force open the windows of the soul so that the blessed sunshine of God's intelligible light may flood the depths of our heart.

Just as the physical sunshine enlightens every man who does not retire into his house, and close windows and doors, so the intelligible light enlightens every soul that does not retire into the flesh and its lusts. Do you want to see the physical sunlight? Open door and window, and nothing can keep it back. Do you want to be enlightened by the intelligible light of the Word or Logos of God? Open the doors and windows of the flesh, by calming it and its lusts, and our heart will be purified and sanctified, by God himself.

This is our righteousness, that God is righteous within us.

And wherever the ground was ready, the seed which was fruitless on the wayside and the stony and thorny ground, yielded an hundred-fold.

Would to God that our hearts were ready!

VI.

THE STARS OF GOD.

"We have seen His star in the East, and are come to worship Him."—S. Matt. ii: 2.

The greatest beauty of nature, the sky, with all the stars, is open to the view of all who care to gaze at it; and yet we can almost count on our fingers the times we have gazed at its sublime glories. We love the dross of this world too much to look up at the eternal beauty above us.

I think that children have much to teach us, in this respect. They will gaze and gaze, and never tire of looking into the unfathomable depths of Heaven. They have only recently come thence; and although the pains of earth have already obscured their little memory of their eternal home in the breast of God, an instinct draws their hearts to the sky and its scintillating stars. Many a little child loves the stars so much that he will reach out his tiny hands to grasp one, and will cry himself to sleep because he cannot make one of them part of his young life.

Although we may laugh at his desire, there is no doubt but that there is a deep meaning to his unsatisfied yearning. For, my beloved, if he only realized it, he is as divine and glorious a star as any one of them. Think of it, he himself is a star of God, sent to the world to enlighten it! To gladden the heart of his Mother! To strengthen the hands of his Father who is growing old! To learn to know and show abroad the great truths of life! To make the world better, happier, and purer for his having lived in it! And last, but not least, to show forth unto all that the highest destiny of man is to do the Will of God!

Every soul is a star of God, blazing with divine light behind the veil of the flesh, lighting the way to the cradle of Bethlehem, to the belief that God is love!

We cannot help learning much, if we will but look upwards to the sky.

If you have ever gazed any length of time at the stars, long enough to tell them apart, and to become familiar with each individual star of the greater sort, you will have noticed that everyone has a different colour, and seems to possess some individual characteristic.

You all know, for instance, of the star called Aldebaran, in the Constellation Taurus. Astronomers say that he is a mighty sun, thousands of times larger than ours; and yet you may always tell him by his fiery redness, flashing and darting a thousand angry colours. He is not conscious what a disagreeable impression he makes upon the universe. He, like many an overbearing and angry man, is so selfish that he does not reflect how bad an example he is to all who are within sight. How many Aldebarans we meet every day of our lives, who little reflect how they are spectacles to men and angels all over the Universe!

Then, there is the star Antares, in the head of the constellation Scorpio. He is one of those green stars you meet every day at teas and receptions, and in their own parlours. Envious is no name for them; they envy anybody's success, and will do things for you just as long as you are successful or can be of use to them.

Then there is the star Regulus in the constellation Leo. He has a reddish-blue selfish stony look, who proposes to have his own way whatever betide. Those stars usually think themselves remarkably kind and yielding; but all the same he is going to have his way. Regulus is not ugly about it; not he; he knows better. His face is always wreathed with smiles; but he is stony beneath it. If he takes a dislike to you, he will plunge a knife into your heart with the grace of an Apollo, with the plausible speech of an advocate.

Of course you all know Sirius, in Canis Major. He is perhaps one of the most beautiful stars in the sky. His splendour, shining in January and February, beneath the constellation Orion always attracts attention. Why, is he not beautiful, sparkling and glowing in every colour of the rainbow, blue, silver, purple, crimson, emerald, and gold? But astronomers tell us that he is only the biggest because he is nearest the Earth, farthest away from the sky. Ah, how many Siriiuses we meet who glow in magnificence unparalleled—why, because they are far from God, and nearest the earth with all its passions! Are there no Siriiuses inside the Church of Christ? Who always head subscription lists when a display is needed, but who are far from Christ?

Among the latest discoveries of science are the double stars. For thousands of years they have ever been considered single stars; but the telescope shows that they are composed of two stars, so close to each other, and revolving round each other, that they seem to be one. I think I have had the privilege of seeing many a double star of God; husbands and wives who have lived so close to each other for so many years, and who love each other so dearly, that when the one dies, the other soon passes away. Then there are double stars, mothers and daughters; boys and boys, girls with girls. Ah, I love to see a double star of God, shining with greater power and might than if either were shining alone. Ah, how much truth and sweetness there is in such a life!

Have you ever seen the constellation called *Pisces Australis*? You will see a few minor points of light with one great light among them, called *Fomalhaut*. Lonely he must be, the only one of his kind in all that portion of heaven! As there are double stars of God, so are there single stars of God; stars that have loved the Light of their life so much, they have never had an earthly mate; but they do not complain; they do not regret; for their

mate is not an earthly one, but God himself. That choice was a good choice; and the stars of God who like Fomalhaut have remained alone that they might serve God and his Church better—my beloved, the crown of gold is on their forehead.

All these stars live their lives to themselves without thinking that they are examples to millions and millions of worlds. Thus is it with us. We are stars of God; and in spite of ourselves we give example to countless hosts; we shine, with some light; it is for us to determine with which. Shall it be the red of passion, like Aldebaran? The green of envy, like Antares? Shall it be the earthy show of Sirius?

Or, my beloved, shall it be the star of the East that told the world of a message of eternal joy? A star so beautiful, that of itself it told the hearts of the wise men, that God had so loved the world, that He had sent it Light and Love? Shall each one of us be stars of the East, calling men to God? Shall we be a Theophany? Shall we be, as the early Church loved to call it, one of the stars of the Holy Lights?

Yes, we will show forth God's love and beauty to the world, will we not, my brothers and sisters?

But perhaps some of us think we are not good enough to shine? That we have not enough of God's light in us to show forth? Ah, my beloved, there it is we are mistaken.

Please tell me, which are the brightest stars in heaven?

Why, of course, the planets, Jupiter, Venus, Mars, and above all, the Moon.

Why, have you never thought of it that the stars that try to shine of themselves shine with the feeblest light? The moon, the brightest of all, shines—how? All the moon does is to let the sun's light be reflected on her. It is thus with us. The utmost we can do is to let the Sun of Righteousness shine on us. All we have to do is to stand quietly, and we will shine a thousand times more glorious-

ly than if we tried to shine of our own light. The utmost light a man has is only the reflection of God's light on him; that is his highest hope.

All of us then who are all God's living stars can shine, if we will only let God's light fall on us. Thus can each one of us shine so beautifully that when wise men shall see us they shall cry out, We have seen God's star, in the East, and we have come to worship Him.

But the stars, beloved, can teach us still another lesson. When the skies at night are clear, the mariner needs not to look at his compass, for he knows by the light of God's stars, which way to steer for the North. But in the cloudy nights of doubt and despair, when darkness has fallen on our soul, it seems we can no more see God's lights and beacons to assure us that God's goodness and love is in heaven. Then, indeed may we take comfort; the eternal stars of God in the breasts of our fellow-creatures, are only hidden by clouds: but if we could stand on higher ground than we are, if we could stand on the mountain-height, we would see the stars in all their glory; when the clouds have come, then we must rise to higher heights, and we shall see the eternal stars, circling in their eternal orbits, singing in the harmony of the spheres. If clouds then come, up, my brother, on to a mountain-height alone with God, and His stars shall shine again!

If we will but watch long enough, the dawn will break: the stars will fade, not because they have stopped shining, but because a greater light than they has arisen. To those who watch, the Sun of Righteousness will arise, and the soul is left alone in the fulness of God's light, when He has become all in all. Grant God the day will come when all human things will fade from our sight, when we shall be left alone in adoration of God, who is all in all in the noonday glory of His eternal light, when we shall see Him as He is, face to face.

VII.

THE DAILY BREAD.

“Give us this day our daily bread.”

Let us not mistake. It is God who gives us all that can be given: not we ourselves, who by our efforts can supply our needs. The law of supply and demand, the law of the survival of the fittest, the law of equivalents—all these laws are only instrumentalities through which the Divine Workman, the Divine Labourer, fulfils his purposes. It is God who works in us both to will and to do. God is He from whom all good counsels, all holy desires, and all just works do proceed. His grace is a free gift, not merited.

All things are Thine, O God and Father of us all. Thou art all that was, and is and is to come. We are helpless, weak and needy, sitting wearily by the shore of eternity, unable to cross its infinite currents. We are weary of crying, we turn to thee, O Father Divine! Give us, give us our daily bread, that we may live, and not die, that we may recover a little our strength before we go hence and be no more seen.

Lapped in luxury from childhood, many of us forget that all we have was given to us at birth, and that we must leave it behind at death. But to the poor there is no need of a reminder that all is a gift of God, when it comes when we least expect it, and when we need it most. God is not only the Infinite Teacher, the Infinite Labourer, the Infinite Lover; he is also the Infinite Giver of all.

II. Give us this day our daily bread.

Give us our daily bread this day. Not yesterday. Not to-morrow. This day. We ask Thee not, O Father, to give us strength to do the distant duty. We ask Thee to help us to-day. This next duty at hand, this little duty nearest us, this momentary duty so insignificant, so useless, so utterly indifferent in respect to our future lives, so distasteful, so homely, so weary, so full of petty drudgery; this next duty at hand, this is the duty that is so hard. Give us strength to do this little duty, Father of heaven. Give us our daily bread to-day; let us know that Thou art with us now, and we will face courageously the desperate gloom of to-morrow. We will not fear the darkness and the silence of the night, of the midnight terror, if Thou, O tender Father, art with us at the hour of dusk. Be with us now, let us do the present duty, and we will gird our loins to the battle, and trust for the future to Thee. We will leave results to Thee; but we will be clean in Thy sight to-day, now, at this hour. Clean must our hands be to-day, if we desire to accomplish our destiny. We can only judge of the future by the present—whatever our destiny be, however loudly it may call to us to abandon all and follow Thee, O Father, our hands must be clean to-day, for we are responsible alone for our present honesty. O give us our daily bread this day!

III. Give us this day our daily bread.

The bread Thou givest us to-day, let it be our bread, O Father who art in heaven. We are not dogs, we are children of the household, Thine own offspring. Hast Thou not begotten us? Have we not all one Father? Are we not in Thine image, and shall we not grow up into Thy likeness? Is it not alone in Thy light that we shall see light? Is it not in Thy love alone that we shall know love? Is it not alone in Thy truth that we shall know truth? Our destiny calls us over land and sea to those

mansions above that were our own before the mountains were brought forth, or ever the earth and the world were made. Thou hast so made us we can never rest until we be at peace upon Thy breast. Thou thyself are our end, our aim, our destiny. Give us our bread, our highest possibilities, our most utter perfection, to-day, to-morrow, and for evermore.

Are we not Thy children? Are we only dogs? Yet the dogs eat of the crumbs that fall from their master's table. Even if we be but dogs, returning to our own vomit, returning to the mud from which we have been just cleansed in a bath of our own tears, knowing not where to seek the light, and like dogs dumb, unable to cry to Thee from out of the depths of our misery and degradation, O Lord hear our voice, O let thine ears consider well the voice of our complaint, Give us this day the daily bread that is ours, from the foundation of the world.

IV. Give us this day our daily bread.

Our bread for which we pray to Thee is a daily bread, Father in heaven.

Daily we retire within to seek Thy altar, from which the sacramental prayers that arise to Thee are fragrant with utter submission to Thy infinite will. Daily we seek Thy blessing. If we eat not physical food daily, we die, O Lord. How much more, if the food of our souls come not daily? Yet the food of our souls comes daily, if we will but daily seek it, if we will but daily consecrate our earthly elements to the informing power of Thy Divine Spirit of Love. Day by day, here a little, there a little, line upon line, precept upon precept, thus does the daily bread feed our souls. The coral insect spends its whole life to build but one single cell; but the daily birth and labour of the offspring rear the eternal rock to a height where the infinite ocean can but humbly lick the foot of the heaven-towering crag. Daily is the divine bread

given to the soul that daily needs it. Daily give us our bread, O heavenly Father.

V. Give us this day our daily bread.

Bread is made of flour, water, yeast, and salt. Bread is subject to the law of gravitation and of conservation of energy. It is composed of carbonates, nitrates, phosphates, and water. Beautiful is the fact that prayer for this physical nourishment is the petition following that desire that God's Will may be done as in heaven so on earth. Professor Benedict says: "I never mourn over any misconception of philosophy or religion more sincerely than I do over the misconception concerning matter. If matter be not itself spirit, it is the dwelling-place of spirit, and so far as we know and can infer, the eternal dwelling-place of spirit. Not only so, the relation between matter and spirit in our own persons is one of reciprocal influence. We are so constituted that our highest intellectual and emotional life cannot be secured without physical nourishment—bread—literal physical bread. And yet this indisputable fact has been presented as one of degradation. Wholesome, pleasurable digestion has been a process for which thousands of professing Christians have felt called upon to apologize or to blush. And yet these same Christians would be obliged to acknowledge that the process of physical nourishment was appointed by their Lord and Maker, and by him made essential, essential to the holiest living. When a saint has voluntarily starved himself to death, what has become of his sainthood? . . . To ask aright for daily bread implies that we do our utmost to keep ourselves in condition to be nourished by the bread. 'Give us this day our daily bread' implies that we have so realized, or are striving so to realize God's holy Will in our bodies, that the bread will produce the nourishment it was designed to produce."

But man needs nourishment for the mind, as well as for the body. He needs knowledge and truth. To study, to read, to investigate, to memorize, to solve mathematical and metaphysical problems, to write prose and poetry, to criticise rightly, to study philology, geology, chemistry, botany, physiology, biology, and anatomy—all these are duties as real as eating bread. The mind must be nourished. Many men do not study because they are too busy labouring for bread and home; how many women are there who dwell protected at home, doing fancy-work and playing cards to kill time. How much better if they studied a little, and did not stultify themselves and insult their Father in heaven when they pray, "Give us this day our mental bread."

Knowledge is not all. Truth is more. What is the use of assembling daily in Church professing to believe the truth, to follow the truth, and to seek the truth, when we really do not give ourselves the least trouble to find out what the truth is? When we are led in our likes and dislikes by prejudice, and refuse to consider difficulties and problems on their own merits, whatsoever others may have said on the subject? Truth is mighty, and will prevail. There is nothing to fear in seeking truth; the sooner we are rid of the false, the better!

Bread physical, is good. Bread mental is better: but bread spiritual is best. What is the food of the spirit? Nothing, if not love. God is love; and since our souls hunger after God, they hunger after love. Since nothing can satisfy the desires of our souls but God, nothing can satisfy the desires and needs of the spirit but love. There alone is eternal joy, eternal peace, eternal satisfaction. There is eternal youth, and eternal life. Learn to love, and you will learn to be divine. He who builds the house labours but in vain unless Love be watching, defending from the enemies of darkness. He who would

never hunger nor thirst again must love, and love love. Then will he become transfigured, on the Mount of Vision.

And to him who seeks the Kingdom of heaven shall all things be added. First the kingdom, then all else. The purpose of life is a trial, a purification. The dear Father will give to each all he needs in order to accomplish the victory over self. How foolish to cease struggling after the end of life, in order to worry anxiously over the means? Seek not the bread that perishes, but the true bread from heaven, eternal, for evermore.

GIVE US this day our daily bread.

Give us THIS DAY our daily bread.

Give us this day OUR daily bread.

Give us this day our DAILY bread.

Give us this day our daily BREAD.

Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled. Amen.

VIII.

THE HOUSE BUILT UPON A ROCK.

"Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man which built his house upon a rock: . . . and it fell not, because it was founded on a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: . . . and it fell, and great was the fall of it."—S. Matt. vii: 24-27.

It is noticeable how in all the great Parables and Teachings of religious literature, and especially those of Jesus, we may always discern two distinct epochs, or periods. First comes the period of preparation, of opportunity; then comes the period of stress, or trial, when that which has developed during the first period is tested, weighed in the balances, judged.

The reason of this is that Parables and Teachings are valuable only in the measure of the fidelity with which they represent life. And life is after all nothing but this, a preparation, and a test. First comes the childhood of preparation—next the manhood of trial of the stuff prepared in childhood. So is life distinctive of men, into those who are successful, and those who are not successful. There is the physical and mental preparation for every year and day, in vacations, and nightly rest. Then comes the time of trial during the season of labour—and that then tells whether the preparation was sufficient and efficient.

There is no parable more vital, or more striking than that short similitude of the house founded on the rock, or on sand.

This luminous similitude suggests so many thoughts that it is hardly possible to do more than to choose from them three; firstly, that each man builds his house; secondly, that it is not as important what the house be as the foundation on which it is built. Lastly, we are reminded once more that there will come the time of trial, when the foundations of all houses shall be tested, and judged.

I. In the first place, there is no doubt but that each man builds his own house.

First, it is important to remember that the house of our life is only one house. It is composed of all our natural faculties, the associations of our childhood, our education at home and abroad. In it we must dwell all our life, to all eternity. At first it is plastic, and may easily be modelled at will; but after a certain period, there comes the time when it can no more be altered. It is therefore a very serious matter that we should early build it so that we may all our life rejoice to dwell in it.

Secondly, at first we have the power to choose what the plan of the house shall be, how rounded, how harmonious. When however the structure has once been begun, whatever additions we may make to the original plan will always remain additions, will always remain visible excrescences. The house will never be harmonious and rounded. It is therefore advisable when the plan of life is being laid, to allow proportionate space for all the rooms that will be needed. If this be not done the house will ever appear irregular, and the man will be called a crank—worse than this—he will not only be called a crank, but will be one.

Thirdly, there should be in the house of our life rooms assigned to all departments of life; one to literature, one to music, one to drawing and painting, one to science, one to exercise, and one also for recreation. There should be a bedroom, where we may take rest, full, deep rest.

Also a dining-room, where all the needs of the body may have full attention. But above all else, there should be in the house of our life, yea, in the very centre of it, a chapel, whither the soul may repair at any and all times to meet its God face to face. Without this chapel all rooms are useless; with it, all rooms are for the first time, valuable.

Last, but not least, the house should be provided with a beautiful reception-room, where the soul may meet other souls in social intercourse. It never was good for any soul to remain alone, without the unselfish prayers and suggestions of fellow-souls.

Fourthly, our house should be provided with large roomy windows through which the sunshine may bathe every nook and cranny of every room. Without sunshine, every room will grow musty and breed sickness. Thus it is in our life. Every department of our human activity should have large windows through which the sunlight of God's love may penetrate. Otherwise, believe me, that department of our life will grow musty and sickly.

Fifthly, it is expedient for us to look to the roof of our house. You know that if any leak occurs in the roof, the moisture will penetrate inside, and not only breed disease, but cause the timbers to rot. It is true that for many years after the process of rotting has begun, the house still presents an imposing appearance. Yet the day will come when suddenly the whole building will crumble to the ground. The roof of the house of our life is unselfishness. The moment the slightest leak occurs, the moisture of passion and laziness makes the whole building full of sickness and sin. Worse than this happens, however. The timbers of our life which support our whole individuality rot away unnoticed; and though the fall be long delayed, it must come some time, as surely as death.

Sixthly, it is important that we should make the inside of our house beautiful, whatever the outside be. It is a great temptation to spend all our efforts in beautifying the outside of the house which every one sees, at the costs of the inside, which alone God and our own soul know. Yet, the older we grow, the more we live in our house; the less opportunity have we to even notice its external appearance. How useless it will be in old age to think of the beautiful exterior while we are condemned to live in a gloomy and unadorned cell. Then we will have plenty time to repent at leisure.

Oh, build it beautiful, build it strong, build it spiritual, this house of yours, young men, and young women!

II. But, after all, the building of the house of life is not so important as the selection of the foundation on which it is built. As long as the foundation is solid, the house will stand fast whether its style of architecture be Byzantine, Romanesque, Renaissance, or Gothic. But however beautiful or poor the house is, as long as the foundation is uncertain, the house must fall.

The reason why the question of what foundation we will choose is so important is that there is more individuality shown in the selection of the foundation, than even in the building of the house. Firstly, We can skimp work on the foundation so much more unnoticed than on the house itself. Everybody sees the outside walls; nobody sees the solid masonry below the level of the road. We can save time, labour and material on the foundation without anybody being the wiser for it. We alone and God will know it; and if we save work on the unseen foundations to make a greater show outside we will appear to be doubly solid to those who never look inside a house of life. Secondly, it is the aggravating condition of life that foundations of rock cannot be found everywhere. Only where the rock is can we build on it. On

the contrary, soft bricks and sand can be found anywhere, carried anywhere we please, and erected into any shape we please. Therefore if we are determined to found our house on our own will, and not on the will of God, it will be very much easier for all concerned to build it out of soft and light bricks.

If then we choose our foundation right, we have done so by overcoming a far greater temptation than we met in selecting the plan of the house; and therefore, we are so much the more to be praised.

But you will ask, What is the rock on which we should build our foundations? I answer, the Will of God, physical, mental, and spiritual. For if we determined to make the foundations of our proposed residence defy the law of gravitation, the result would not be so much the worse for the law of gravitation, but so much worse for us. Likewise with the spiritual precepts of God. They are not arbitrary commands given by God for the fun of seeing whether we will obey them or not. They are merely statements of the spiritual laws of the Universe; to which, if we will conform, we will continue to exist; to which if we will not conform, it will simply be so much the worse for us.

Beloved, let the foundations of the houses of our life be built on the only true and lasting foundation: truth, fact, the Will of God, as expressed in all laws, known and unknown, physical, mental and spiritual. And the laws of the spiritual Universe are well known: purity, unselfishness, and truth.

III. We have but a moment to consider the last and most important part of our subject. This is the fact that God tests or judges our spiritual house and its foundation, sooner or later, in one way or another.

The rain descends, the floods come, and the winds of God blow. These are poverty, pain, sorrow and death.

What is stronger than poverty? What is stronger than pain? What is stronger than sorrow? What is stronger than death? This it behooves us to find out for ourselves. What that we have now, that we can attain now, is stronger than all these?

I know of nothing if it be not purity, unselfishness, or truth. They are the only things in heaven and earth which we can hope to carry with us through it all; and these were, as we saw, the expression of God's Will in the spiritual realm—the rock on which the house of life must be founded, if it would withstand the rains, the floods, and the winds.

Grant God that when the hour of trial has come to us, we may be refined as the fire in the furnace of the mercy of God, and that through all the poverty, pain, suffering and death, the flame of our life may burn steadily and surely, until it be reunited for ever to the fire of the Breath of God.

IX.

THE PATIENCE OF GOD.

“They seemed unto him but a few days for the love he had to her.”—Gen. xxix: 20, 25-27.

There are perhaps no more solemn times in the life of man than those seasons when he has entered into a new field of labour. All the associations which shall form the conditions among which his life is to be carried on are still plastic and unformed. To a great extent he can make them what he desires. Thus is he the architect of his fortunes—his destiny lies in his hands.

Jacob had arrived in Syria, and had made a good impression, since both of Laban's daughters were willing to look forward to becoming his wives. What shall he do now? He must work, faithfully and honestly. For the present, his past crimes will not trouble him, and he has a season of rest in which he can grow strong enough to live down his past life, when he shall return to face the consequences of his crimes.

But work was not irksome to him. He loved Rachel, and the days he spent working by her side were days of the greatest happiness. They seemed so short, and so pleasant that he thought of nothing more. And they seemed to him but a few days, for the love he had for her. Work by her side was but an opportunity of knowing her better, for according to the Bible narrative, the daughters of Laban though rich seem to have busied themselves with work. How short must those seven happy years have seemed to Jacob.

And this is always the case. We always feel that the days we enjoy are short. How quickly the sun sets when the occupation has been pleasant some summer afternoon! How dull the day seems when the task is hard. To the spinner in the factory the slow hours barely creep along; to the onlooker in the theatre the minutes fly unnoticed. Alas, there is no sadder comment on the dimness of spiritual vision than the complaint that the prayers we offer to God are too long. We do not grudge an hour to the political speaker, to the lecturer, to the teacher, to the lawyer; but to the preacher, twenty minutes is the dead line which he crosses only at his peril. The preacher is looked upon at times by some, perhaps, as a necessary tribulation of the flesh incident to the fulfilment of duty in going to Church. We read in Buckle's *History of Civilization* that the Covenanters of Scotland thought five hours not too long for a service, at times. Whose fault is this fact of weariness in the service of God? It is the fault of us all, ministers as well as people; if we could only love Rachel a little more, the seven years would seem shorter. . . . How many of us would as lightheartedly devote an afternoon or evening a week to the communion with God as to some euchre club, or sociable gathering, or party?

If we loved Rachel, we would not grudge to devote to her even seven years; seven years would not seem long. Let us learn to love God.

II. Yet does it not seem risky to serve seven years for Rachel, when we shall, like Jacob, be disappointed, and receive Leah instead? Is not this deceit on the part of Laban? Must always the natural come before the spiritual? When we cry to God to come closer to Him, to become spiritual, is it deceit in Him to give us the natural instead? No; it is a law of the Universe that first is that which is natural, then that which is spiritual, as S.

Paul said so well. First we must serve for Leah; and if we fulfil another week of years, then shall we receive Rachel too.

The secret of it is that God abides in eternity, and that we only vegetate in a span of life. We cry for righteousness, we seek holiness, we demand from God purity; we would be changed into His image by magic; we would leave behind us the consequences of our sins—and God promises indeed that we shall be freed from them; but not to-morrow, or next day. First must we fulfil that which is natural, and then, indeed, that which is spiritual.

It is a law of universal life that the natural should precede the spiritual. First came Hagar, with the natural Ishmael; second came Sarah, with the spiritual Isaac. Take even the example of our blessed Lord. If God came to this world, would you not think that He would come to it immediately in power and majesty? Would He not begin His work immediately among the Sons of Men? Why waste so much time on earth before giving the light to man? Because first is that which is natural, and then that which is spiritual. Before the glorious ministry of three years, must come the childhood in Bethlehem, the long manhood of thirty years at Nazareth. Then came that which is spiritual.

And it is good, that it should be so. Shelley says that there is a language known only to those who die; and he is right. Only those who have been sick, who have lain at the door of death, who have rejoiced and suffered and wept, and called down blessings on their fellow-creatures, can hope to understand the full dignity and destiny of humanity. Was it not for that the Christ came, that He might be tried and tempted in all points as we, that He might weep at the grave of Lazarus, that He might bless the little children that were brought to Him?

And yet, Jesus was God.

It is for this reason that a late writer has said that even angels cannot love as we can. For angels can only love from the very loveliness of their being, loving all souls equally, unindividually. But we, how can we help being bound to all eternity to those souls who have lived with us, with whom we have in moments of overzealousness quarrelled, and with whom we have made it up again, sealing the bond with the tears of peace? To those souls who have given us food when we were hungry babies, to those souls whose sorrows and wounds we have healed while they were still palpitating in the flesh; to those souls to whom a common love of God has united us forever? Perhaps that writer is right.

III. But though all this be true, it is hard, sometimes. God is so infinitely patient, and His long-suffering is so much more infinite than ours. When we have plans, we stake the existence of our souls on their accomplishment immediately—but God who sees where we are blind knows that in His infinite patience it shall be all outwrought. God is so patient, because He knows so much.

This divine patience is the characteristic of all truly great lives. To Abraham were the promises made, and in faith in them he left his kindred and his home, and he died before he saw them realized. Ten generations rose and fell before the promises were fulfilled; but the hope of Israel was its greatness. It is not always necessary that God's promises should be fulfilled during our life-time; God will find some way of answering our prayers, even if we pass away from this little life before the answer comes. A friend of mine said that he thought Emerson had been the only man he had ever known who seemed to believe in eternity—for he never hurried; he knew that in God's wise providence there was a place for every good deed, and in God's eternity, there is no need to hurry or hasten.

But it is in the nature of man to look for fulfilment immediately. It was thus in the life of Jesus. At the age of twelve when He saw the temple for the first time, His heart swelled within Him, and He knew He must be about His Father's business. So interested was He in it that He forgot everything else, and was three days alone in the temple. But it was not to be. He must wait yet; the hour was not yet come. Submissively, sweetly, He followed Mary to Nazareth, and stayed by her side for eighteen years more. Then the time came; then He was baptized; then He was ready, rounded, to do the perfect work; and in the completeness of His nature He did His Father's Will.

We have another instance, if we may trust many Commentators, in Isaiah. Young Isaiah was jealous for the Lord; the prophetic spirit within him rose up and made him cry in the by-ways of Israel to recall them to their God. And he prophesied, probably the first thirty-nine chapters of his prophecy. Evidently then the Lord drew him into the desert alone, made him wait for many years of seeming waste and helplessness—but the time came that the young Isaiah's harsh and thin voice became mel-
lowed by the glories of the Lord, and deepened by his deeper vision; and he opened his mouth and cried, Comfort ye, comfort ye my people—until the whole world should listen for all ages to the unique words of his prophecy. The Lord's patience was infinitely greater than Isaiah's; but in the fulness of time the spiritual glory descended and brooded over Isaiah's forehead.

There are very few souls who have not in their heart of hearts a deep longing after some plan, some ideal, some hope which they seek to realize in their lives—but it would seem as if God would not hear their prayers, and would not fulfil their aspirations. But in the fulness of time every soul shall accomplish its ideal; every heart's

desire shall be fulfilled, every darkness shall be made light. In His infinite patience, God will bring it to pass; Leah may be forced on us, but some day Rachel herself in all her maiden loveliness shall be ours; all that we can do is to watch, and wait, praying, loving and purifying ourselves that when the fulness of time shall arrive we may stand up in the whole dignity of manhood to the greatness of our divinely appointed destiny.

How often Jacob must have thought of the infinite patience of God while he was serving for Rachel the second week of years, looking in the inscrutable blue of the sky, that seems to be such a beautiful parable of the long-suffering and tenderness of God, brooding over us, so beautiful, so clear, so eternal, filling us with peace and calm. And though we cannot pasture flocks like Jacob and spend days in its contemplation, we may lift our hearts to that eternal protecting Love that never falters in Its tenderness, though It be so wisely patient in all the anxious desires of our life. And in Its contemplation, our lives will grow calmer and more peaceful, ever more ready to behold with our own eyes the coming of that hour when the heavenly Rachel shall be ours, and we shall have accomplished the noblest aspirations of our soul.

Let us pray that God will make us more submissive to His will, that we may more and more understand the tenderness and easily-entreatedness of His omniscient patience; and in contemplation of that, we will grow patient ourselves.

IV. But let us not think that God delays our hopes because He desires to disappoint us, to sadden us. No: He is patient only because He knows that some day we shall be more harmonious, more perfect than we are to-day. None of us will remain at the same point at which we are—we shall change, all of us. Our loving Father

above makes us wait because He knows that some day we shall be so much closer to Him that we shall be able to derive from the opportunities we seek to-day more than we could while we are still, as Tennyson says, slight, and unformed. He waits, because He knows that we are not yet fully developed; because we are not yet all that we shall be some day. Our development must not be stopped until we have attained our full stature, until we have become purified by the peaceful snows of age. He waits out of tenderness. Some day our jarring incompleteness and inharmoniousness shall be lost in the harmony of God; our dimness, in His light; our weariness, in the lightning of His fiery love. Then His patience shall have borne its fruit, the times shall have been fulfilled, and when the hour has come, we will go forth conquering and to conquer until when the worlds have been enlightened with His light, God shall be all in all.

X.

THE MIRACLE OF FEEDING.

“So they did eat, and were filled: and they took up of the broken meat that was left seven baskets.”—S. Mark viii: 1-8.

The beautiful story never grows old. A few loaves, a few fishes, and seven baskets are the result! In what good humour, how surprised, must have been the disciples! Surely their conception of the Master must have risen a hundredfold, seeing traces of his wonderful power in the small, practical details of regular life which seemed so commonplace. Henceforth they must have listened more humbly to His teachings, must have uncovered their heads in holier awe.

We can feel with and for them, for we too, just at the beginning of a New Year, feel as surprised, as pleased, as awed, as the disciples did by the shore of the Galilean Lake. Christmas just passed, with its divine spiritual and temporal blessings of all kinds. We have looked into each others' faces on New Year's day, and have wished each other a fortunate New Year. With hope and expectation we do each task more perfectly, we attack each new sphere of usefulness with a more determined purpose.

But this is not all. We can feel for and with the disciples by the Galilean Lake because, unconsciously, we have been doing the same thing as they, actually gathering seven basketfuls of remnants of what was over and above the loaves and fishes we had in our hands.

You ask, how is this? I answer: Last year we sowed deeds, actions, thoughts, feelings, hopes,—which seemed so trifling as to be unnoticed and to disappear as soon as sown—but when we gathered the remnants on New Year's day, we reaped not such small things as loaves and fishes, but seven great, huge basketfuls of character! At the end of the year we expected to find nothing more than the small daily deeds and thoughts, and lo, we find, on gathering them, seven basketfuls of habits, increased aptitude, increased love of duty, increased devotion to God, with a crown of glory, of conquest in each basket. And we find, we are one year closer to God.

Do you doubt me when I say that we have found seven baskets of remnants? Listen. First we have gathered a whole basketful of purity; second, of unselfishness; third, of truth; fourth, of humility; fifth, of endurance; sixth, of resignation; and last, of thoughtfulness.

The first basket is a basket full of purity. The pride of the eyes, and the lust of the heart have grown distasteful to us. The pleasures of the world have palled on us. It is true that the world is as merry as ever; but our places in it are filled by others. Sooner or later each must drop out of society and its frivolous inanities; others must take our places, and we be forgotten, in the mad whirl and rush of pleasure. Slowly but surely our heart turns from the gaiety and laughter of the world. Slowly, but surely, the silent spirit-realm closes in around us, and we pass through the places that knew us before, as strangers, as curious sight-seers. Of the remnants, we have filled the first basket with purity, and in it is the crown of self-control. "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God."

The second basket is a basket full of unselfishness. Long ago, when we were young, we elbowed our way to the front; but a mistake or two at the start, then a few graver ones in times of thoughtlessness, and we were out

of the line of promotion. Then we found success was not all. With age, we grew gentler, tenderer, and kinder; and before we knew it, there were enough remnants of unselfishness, first to those we loved, secondly to all the world, to fill the second basket crammed full, leaving only room enough to put on it the crown of love. "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it."

The third basket is a basket full of sincerity. Nothing is taught more thoroughly by the vicissitudes of this world, than that nothing pays in the end, but absolute sincerity. The man who values his soul at a few stolen goods, finds out sooner or later that he has not escaped the eye of God, and has humiliated himself. Of course, sincerity need not mean foolish divulging of your inner life to all in afternoon tea gossip. But sincerity towards God, towards our soul, at the cost of death, of dishonour, of adversity . . . is cheap. Only he who is true to himself, will ever be true to everything in his life that is noble and divine. So we pack into the full basket the crown of sincerity. . . . "For he that overcometh, and keepeth my words unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: And he shall rule them with a rod of iron . . . and I will give him the morning star."

The fourth basket is shaken down, pressed, and running over with humility. The only man who can afford to be conceited is the man who is not fortunate enough to be acquainted with anything better than himself; and, God knows, there is need of going but a little distance to find something better than we ourselves are. Life is so infinitely mysterious, God is so infinitely beautiful and wonderful, that he who knows either or both becomes the humbler as he is wiser. Conceit is ignorance; and knowledge and wisdom can be measured by humility. Make

place in the fourth basket of remnants for the crown of humility. "He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before His angels."

The next basket of remnants is the fifth. Endurance fills it to the brim. Youth, and its fulness of opportunities permits prodigality; but the older man, who has only a few opportunities this side of the grave left him, husbands his strength, works in earnest. Those who have been in Bochim are patient, enduring, kind. How brightly the bejeweled crown of endurance shines, resting on the heaped remnants. "Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is the new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God, and I will write upon him a new name."

The sixth basket is full of resignation to the blessed Will of God. Many the mistakes we make, when we choose our own paths, and do not follow duty. Follow destiny, my beloved, obey the advice of your tender Father, and you will never repent having listened to the still small voice of conscience, which whosoever follows, receives the crown of peace. "He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death."

Only one basket more, the seventh. These remnants of our last year's life, have taught us to remember death. Not indeed like the Egyptian at whose banquet a slave uttered the empty reminder of mortality; but that ever-living remembrance that some day we must leave behind us all the world prizes, and stand naked before the judgment-seat of God. Remember Death. Remember those among us, of this congregation, who during this last year have passed from among us, to where beyond these voices there is peace. Remember the death of our parents, and

relatives, and remember how fleeting all associations are. Remember that the time is short, that the day of grace is passing, and that it befits us to labour not for the meat that perishes, not for the clothes and the food that we must leave behind, but for the eternal life beyond, where we will be ranked not according to wealth, but according to holiness, and righteousness. Remember death; soon, too soon, days and moments quickly flying, lead us to the grave; and then—then, after death the judgment. “To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.”

So, as we sowed loaves and fishes of daily duties, we have reaped and gathered as remnants seven great basketfuls of character, a day's march nearer home. A basket each of purity, of unselfishness, of sincerity, of humility, of endurance, of resignation, of remembrance of Death. Is not this a miracle, out of a few loaves and fishes of daily deeds, seven huge baskets full of character? And if this be a miracle, shall we not do as the children of Galilee did that afternoon by the Galilean Lake? Shall we not call the Christ within, our King? Shall we not loyally offer Him our hearts for this beautiful New Year that lies untrodden, virgin, before us? Shall we not call Him our King, shall we not beseech Him with tears not to withdraw Himself from us? Shall we not hold the hem of His garment, His royal robe, from Winter to Spring, from Spring to Summer, from Summer to Autumn, from Autumn to Christmas again? Surely it is well to be near such a King, surely we may ascribe to the great Feeder and Shepherd of souls, who will multiply our weary duties into the virtues that shall make us overcome, who will use His power to give us of remnants only seven baskets filled with seven crowns; surely we may ascribe to the great Divine within, all love, all light, and all peace, now and forever more, Amen!

XI.

SILENCE.

“There is a time to keep silence, and there is a time to speak.”
—Eccl. iii: 7.

Many are the books that tell of the words of Jesus, since the time that Matthew wrote in Hebrew the sayings of the Master. Stier has written a library on this subject. But who has written of the silences of Jesus? Did He not remain still while the Jews accused the woman taken in adultery? Was He not still when Pilate urged Him to defend Himself? Was He not still on the cross? Had He not been still during the long nights spent in prayer on the solitary mountains in Galilee? What wonderfully expressive seasons of silence those were. Words would have been useless, needless, impertinent; silence was greater, deeper, more divine.

There are times to speak, and times to keep silent. Not that there is anything wrong, of itself, in speaking or remaining silent. Jesus did both. But speaking or remaining silent is reprehensible when words are spoken, or the tongue is still at the wrong time. Oh, how often we regret for a whole lifetime not to have spoken some word when it was on our lips, and the occasion passed away for ever; when the mother whose forgiveness had not been asked dies suddenly; when the child we have hurt by a thoughtless word is taken away from our life by some unforeseen occurrence! But the divine power of the words and the silences of Jesus was that they always occurred at the right time; He spoke the word of love to

the rich young man, He was silent before the accusers of the woman taken in adultery.

The trouble and the sorrow of our daily life does not come from talking or remaining silent; it comes from the forgetting of the times to keep silence, and the times to speak. Judgment is required, to do the right thing at the right time; and if this be done, the whole of our lives will be harmonious and rounded. It is useless to curse our tongues, or to heap maledictions on ourselves because we cannot speak; judgment, wisdom, common-sense are required to fulfil all righteousness.

There are four aphorisms worth remembering.

I. Those who talk do not know: and those who know do not talk.

The more learned a man becomes, the more does he realize how much he still ignores; the more humble does he grow; the more valuable are his words, the fewer they become. The more a man knows, the more mysterious does the world seem; the more marvellous each clod of clay, each shining star in heaven. The more wonderful the world, the more reverent and awed is he; the less has he the power to say.

The more he knows, the more gentle, kind-hearted and pitiful does he become. God is so charitable to the fallen sinner, only because He knows his weakness, the anguish of his repentance, and the weariness of his long repayment. When the woman caught in adultery was brought before Jesus, He was silent; and when all had gone, He said to her, Go, and sin no more. She had punished herself more than any other person living could.

Again, the man who has an opinion ready on every subject, who knows he is right and everybody else wrong, who is always saying something whether there be sense in it or no, who is continually jabbering—that man

confesses in so doing that he knows nothing; for he must know but little to be able to set all his knowledge in order in one moment. Think if you can of the men of your past acquaintance who knew most; you will find that they were the most silent.

That is the reason God is so silent in our lives, even at times when we are in distress, when our sorrow has beclouded our wisdom. We ignore and talk; God knows and is still.

II. The second aphorism is as follows: "Those who talk have no strength of will; those whose will is strong do not talk."

The experience of us all warns us that as soon as we tell somebody else of some decision we have taken, we feel it ebb away from us, or change immediately. There is no surer way of dimming spiritual vision and weakening determinations that have only been arrived at by tears and anguish, than to talk about them.

Who does not know that the strong man is the silent man, who goes about his business with only a few words?

Who does not know that when a man is being tortured, at the beginning of the trial, while he is yet strong in will, he is silent, and none can draw a groan or a word from his lips? Do you not know that as soon as the torture is beginning to tell on him, that he begins to rave, and groan, and curse in his anguish? Do you not know that as soon as his will is broken he will talk like a windmill, will babble like a child or an idiot?

Do you not know that if a man in his sober state is as silent as the grave, as soon as liquor begins to unman him, he jabbars and gives away all his secrets?

Who does not know that when a man rises in the morning he says but little at the breakfast table, but when he returns from his work at night, he is exceedingly loquacious? Why is this? Simply because in the morn-

ing he is strong, ready for work; at night, when he has worked, and is weary, and has lost his strength of will; then, he talks.

Who does not know that talking fast is not a sign of culture and power, but of weakness? Consider the races that talk fastest, and compare them with those which talk slowest, and you will notice a great difference. Go to the zoological garden, and hear how fast the monkeys chatter; go to the street, and hear how endless is the jabber of the common Italian. Then go into the lecture-room, the court-house, the counting-house, and you will hear slow, deliberate, distinct, wise enunciation and formulation of words.

Do you not know by your experience that among the men you meet those who are freest in their words, who are most obliging and accommodating, who are urbane, over-polite, are really the least manly men, whose will is like a feather, whose determination is like water? Are not the most unreliable men sometimes those who will talk loudest and longest about God, His angels, men, and the Universe? Why is it that the Latin races, so brilliant in their conversation, so endowed with genius, so tenderly expressive in politeness and oratory, are those whose plans are never carried out, whose public opinion is turned in a moment from one extreme to the other?

Why is all this so? Simply because those who talk have no strength of will, and those whose will is strong do not speak.

That is the reason why God is silent. His will is strong and beyond all expression that, in the shape of natural laws of physical, psychical and spiritual realms it is ever being fulfilled without noise, without heralding, without warning, without failure. Let us learn a lesson of Will from the silence of God and His angels.

III. But this is not all. The third aphorism tells us that those who talk do not act, and those who act do not talk.

No man can do two things at the same time. Either he will talk, or he will work. If you go to a factory or to a school where work is going on, you will find that silence reigns there; but as soon as you hear a babble of voices you know that recess for luncheon has just begun. Words are useless except as signs of deeds, present, past or future; but when signs only are dealt with, then the man becomes, unconsciously a hypocrite—for what else is the man who promises but never performs? As a rule, you will find that it is possible to gauge a man's power of solid honest work by his power of remaining silent for a long while. Serious men and women who are under heavy responsibilities speak little, like the gripman or motorman, the railroad switchman, the ship's pilot, the engineer, and the surgeon performing a dangerous operation. Who is always speaking? The society man or woman who attends teas, receptions and parties; who is talking the whole time and does not remember five minutes after what was said.

History proves this, too. Cicero, Demosthenes, were the great orators of all times; but they always veered in their opinions towards the fat salaries of the majority; and when the time to die came, the venerable Cicero, who had written the affecting Treatise on Old Age, fled like a coward, and cried like a school-girl. Where was Demosthenes when Philip came to Athens with his legions? Alas, some clergymen and some laymen do too much talking and too little work.

This is the reason why God, His angels, and His people are always silent. God is working every moment; He has no time to be talking all the while; and this is the reason why often we think He has become dumb; where-

as, if we looked around us, we would see Him working all the time in the Universe, from the worm up to the star, from the grass up to man. Let us learn a lesson of action from the silence of our Father and our God!

IV. The last aphorism is that those who talk do not feel, and those who feel do not talk.

Do you not know how it eases the feelings of the sinner, of the repentant sinner, to go to confession? How it calms the tears of the heart-broken child to lay his head on the breast of his mother, and tell her of his shame and sorrow? How the man who is always writing poetry never accomplishes any practical good; how the man who boasts of his affection for his family is usually stern and cold to them?

This is the reason why God is so silent; He loves us with a love that is so deep it is beyond all language, all expression, all sensible assurance; why the angels are ever still and calm when they bring us light from above. Do you not know that a man who loves his wife rightly is always stillest when near her, that a mother fondling her new-born infant has tears, but no words? Let us learn a lesson of feeling from the silence of God.

Mrs. Browning beautifully says:

"We'll be calm,
And know that, when indeed our Joves come down
We all turn stiller than we have ever been."

From all this we may learn three practical lessons.

First. In your conversation always speak as well and as distinctly and as beautifully as you can. Words ought to be few and precious.

Second. Remember that Jesus says that every single word we speak will be brought into judgment, because it is part of ourselves for ever.

Third. Learn the wisdom of keeping silence at the

right time. In hell are many good resolutions and few deeds; in heaven are only deeds, and no resolutions that have not been kept. We must make earth heaven by filling it with deeds, with love, with power of will, and with knowledge.

Remember that those who talk do not know, and those who know do not talk.

Remember that those who talk have no strength of will, and those who have power of will do not talk.

Remember that those who talk do not act; and those who act do not talk.

Remember that those who talk do not love, and those who love do not talk.

Remember that there is a time to talk, and that there is a time to keep silent.

Remember this now; and remember that you will be reminded of this when it will be too late, on the day of judgment. God have mercy on us then!

XII.

THE KEYS.

St. Matt. xvi, 19; St. Luke xi, 52; Rev. i, 18.

The references to keys found in the New Testament, are extremely suggestive. First, Jesus promises Peter to give him the "keys of the kingdom of heaven." Jesus confers elsewhere the same power of loosing and unloosing on all the disciples, so that Peter stands in no pre-eminence. Second, to the Pharisees Jesus said: "Woe unto you, lawyers! for ye have taken away the key of knowledge; you entered not in yourselves, and them that were entering in ye hindered." John saw, thirdly, Him like unto the Son of man, and heard him say, "I am he that liveth and was dead and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and death."

I. On these texts, the first and the most natural observation is that the Kingdom of Heaven is only accessible by a key.

In order to understand the full significance of a key, it may be worth while to consider what is known in general concerning such an instrument. It may have happened to most of us, at some time of our lives, to return home late at night, and to find that the latch-key had been forgotten when going out, or had been mislaid. In such a moment of unpleasant surprise the full value of a key became evident. Nor would any key do. There is need of one particular key, that

will just fit the lock, neither more, nor less. For the lack of that one key, it may be necessary to spend the night at a hotel, or to walk the streets in the cold and the rain till the morning, or to break open a sash or door-panel by violence, or to fetch a locksmith. Compare with all this annoyance the comfort of entering home any time of day or night, without the least exertion. This is a parable of the Kingdom. He who does not possess the exact key, like which there is no other one in existence, by which the gate of Heaven opens forthwith, without effort, will never be able to enter.

II. The second consideration which the texts adduced suggest is, If it be true that all this is a parable, what is the application of it? What part of our practical life is the key of Heaven.

The key of Heaven is nothing more nor less than man himself. The lock is this beautiful world; the street from which man seeks to depart is the natal condition of subjection to the lusts of the flesh, and the house is our long-lost home, from which we strayed so long ago, the dwelling of our Father.

Modern Yale locks are so made that only one single key in the world will open it. If you have lost the key, there is only one thing to do, to break the lock, and put in a new one. You are all aware that when business men lose the combination of their safe, the Safe manufacturers have to hire burglars from State Prison to break it open. But the Kingdom of Heaven cannot be broken by any burglar, or cracked by any dynamite. Unless we have the right combination, unless the key is exactly the right one, never to all eternity will the Gate swing open, and the angels come out to meet and greet us. The point before us is as follows: God made the lock of Heaven, that is, this world, in such a fashion, that man will never be able to

open the lock of life until he has succeeded in making himself exactly of a certain pattern. It is therefore not a matter of good intentions; this is a mere matter of knowledge and use of it. No man can enter heaven until he have conquered the lusts of the flesh, selfishness, anger and hate. Only to him that overcometh himself will be given the crown of life.

III. These thoughts open the way to the third consideration. It is not sufficient, first, to know that the Kingdom is accessible only to a key, and secondly, that man is himself the key. It must be pointed out, thirdly, to what most men are keys.

Now a locksmith alters the key in order to fit the lock, and not the lock to the key. Most men, however, expect God to alter the world, and God's requirements for admission to Heaven so as to fit themselves. It is surprising how many men there are who never dream of the possibility that they will be rejected at the last day. They lead comfortable, careless lives with the full expectation of going to glory the moment they die. Even if they are told that only those who are worthy find admittance, they suppose that they will be just good enough to be let in, and that their enemies and neighbors will be just bad enough to be excluded. They have no idea of changing themselves. They never think that unless the blank key is fitted to the lock it will never turn.

Many try to unravel the mystery of life once in their existence, and if they fail, they suppose it is impossible to do so. Or, they catch at some idea and hold to it obstinately to the end of their lives, whether it accounts for all the facts, and really assists them to lead nobler lives, or not. How foolish they are you can imagine by thinking of a locksmith who should be called to open a locked door whose key had been lost, and who would

try a certain key, and when it failed to open, would, without trying further, give up in despair, saying that the door could never be opened. I wonder whether you would pay him high wages for such service? Or, if he tried to open the door, and being unsuccessful, chose a certain key, and said it was the key of the house, although it did not open the door, would you not consider him crazed? What use would be the key if it did not open the lock, and admit us to the fire, the bread and meat of the comfortable room within?

There is one part of the parable that must not be overlooked. It is to enter this fulness of life and joy while still in the mantle of this flesh that we seek the key that shall unlock it. That we have entered the house-kingdom will be proved, not by vain boasting, but by the actual proof of disposal of these perfections. It is a house-kingdom worth entering . . . it contains all that makes life worth living.

The fact is, the key must be altered to open the lock, and it does not matter what be the shape of the key as long as it draws back the bolt. We must experiment ceaselessly, until we succeed. We must cut off something here, add a little there, file down this side, and turn the other. We must expect that it will at last be in a different shape from what it is now.

Some one will ask, is there anything to guide a man in this experiment? The answer is, Nothing but experience. Nevertheless, you will discover that if you read the Bible very carefully you will find that your particular key is described therein; and when you are successful you will be very angry with yourself for having made the experiments much longer and harder by refusing to listen to the precepts and descriptions to be found in that book.

If one key opens only one lock, then, if a key opens one lock, it will not open another. Most of us, my be-

loved, are misfit keys. That is, misfit, in respect to the Gate of Heaven. One of us opens the door of the theatre, fast enough, I warrant you; but when it comes to the door of Bethel, the house of God . . . then hear it fumble and crack. Another of us opens the baseball and football field; another, shopping; another, receptions, dinners, teas, the markethouse, the counting-house, the bank, the insurance house, the railroad, even perhaps the clergy-house . . . but when you come to try the world-lock, the Gate of Heaven . . . you may pull and you may push until you are red in the face but the lock never yields one hair's breadth. Misfit keys we are; we had better see to it that by reflection and experiment we so alter the form and substance of it that the Gate of Heaven may open to let us in.

Here are four short practical suggestions.

(1.) When you introduce a key into the hole of the lock, it is necessary to turn the key from right to left, or from left to right. Otherwise it will not open the lock. This is a parable of human life. No human soul will ever unlock the world-lock until all the currents of its life be thoroughly turned into the contrary direction; that is, until it be quite converted. "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again, except a man be regenerated, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

(2.) A key is an instrument to save labour for the hand. Therefore it performs labour; it is pushed in one direction so hard till it in its turn pushes the bolt. Consequently, it is hard work for the key; it suffers. So Jesus, the Great Eternal Masterkey, when on Gethsemane he was turning the world-lock, when he was solving the problem of life, throwing back the bolt of flesh which should open to all who heed it the full glory of the kingdom of heaven, he, Jesus, "his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground"

while he was praying. Do not forget, only by suffering, by sorrow, by the valley of the Shadow of Death, by the vale of Bochim, does the human soul-key turn the world-lock. If you are looking for a life of ease and comfort, think twice before you undertake the road.

Nor is this turning the only pain. In order to fit the lock the key must be punched here, cut off there, added to on the other side. Reconstructing the human soul-key is no fun; it is pain. Be prepared for it.

(3.) Has it ever happened to you to lose your bunch of keys? Let this teach us that it is possible, after once learning the truth, to slide back, to lose it, to return to the mire from which we were cleansed. The soul-key that has once learnt the truth, but has forgotten it, is in as bad a condition as the soul-key that has never learnt it. Unless we are persistent, and hang on to it doggedly we may lose it again. I know a man who during the twenty-seven years of his life has three times found the truth, and three times lost it. Only a few months ago he found it for the fourth time. God grant that he may not lose it again. But he is not worse than myself, or than any of us. Who dare say that he has never fallen from the truth he has once known? Let us be humble, and pray God if perchance of His infinite mercy He may keep us from losing our bunch of keys, and if we lose it, that we may soon find it again. I should advise, if you have your bunch of keys, hang it round your neck by an unbreakable chain; hold it tight; you never know when you will need it.

(4.) When we go home, and find the door locked, and nobody is at home, we have to stay outside just as long as we have no key that fits the lock. So with the Kingdom of Heaven. Is it not advisable to get the knowledge by which you can unlock this world immediately? What is the use of waiting? You are only losing

time and opportunities; you will never be younger than you are now. Let us be warned; we will be kept standing out in the cold and the darkness and the fog, until the desolation of despair of lost opportunities will show us at the left . . . not the right . . . of the throne, amidst the lightnings of the wrath of God. Get yourselves wisdom, ere it be too late. Wisdom is priceless, but in the reach of all. She standeth at the corners of the streets, offering her priceless treasures for naught. Be wise while there is yet time.

Find the key of life and use it; and you will find ourself in God.

XIII.

BOCHIM.

“And they called the name of the place, Bochim.”—Judges ii: 5.

Abraham went into the Promised Land, led by his faith in God; but he never owned more of it than sufficed for his own grave. Patriarch after patriarch saw the hope still before him, but the last of them died strangers in a foreign land. Hope once more returned to the children of Israel when Moses and Aaron led them into the desert, standing between them and God. But Aaron took off his blue robe and was gathered unto his fathers on the top of Mount Hor in the midst of the weary wilderness; and Moses was last seen by the tented hosts of Israel as a speck on the summit of Pisgah on Mount Nebo gazing, with face at last unveiled, into that Promised Land he was not to touch with the sole of his feet. After them, Joshua and Eliazar arose, and in silence led the hosts of Israel to the Jordan. Jericho was taken, Ai razed, and Makkedah won. But when all the elders which had known all the works of the Lord which He had performed by the hands of Moses and Aaron crowded around the biers of Joshua and Eliazar, they still saw the strongholds of the Midianites towering in the fastnesses of the mountains. And now, when at last they had learnt by all their late reverses that their enemy could only be driven out in the name of Jahweh, the Angel of the Lord came up from Gilgal and said, “I have made you to go up out of Egypt, and have brought you unto the land which I sware unto your forefathers; and I said, I

will never break my covenant with you. And ye shall make no league with the inhabitants of the land: ye shall throw down their altars; but ye have not obeyed my voice. Why have ye done this? Wherefore I also said, I will not drive them out before you, but they shall be as thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare unto you." Is it any wonder then that it came to pass that when the angel of the Lord spake these words unto all the children of Israel, that the people lifted up their voice and wept, and called the name of that place Bochim, which is, being interpreted, the place of weeping.

Amidst their bitter weeping the people felt that the hour of judgment had come full righteously; that the Angel of the Lord was right, and that if they had not driven out the enemy in the past, they could never hope to do so in the future. They were now not as strong as they had been when they crossed the Jordan on dry foot.

First, they had lost the eagerness and impetus of the first attack. They had lost the advantage of the great terror which had at first unnerved the five kings of Makkedah, and the sons of Anak and the Zamzummins stood up to battle before the face of Israel at Gaza, Gath and Ashdod. Third they had lost their leader; each man did that which was good in his own eyes. How could small bands conquer large cities? Fourth, they had lost their faith, since Jericho, Ai, and Makkedah. Fifth, they had lost their character of pilgrims; they were too busy securing booty each man for himself to continue fighting for the Lord. They had, in the sixth place, lost their youth. The Israelites who had tempted God at Meribah, had left their bones in the desert. Caleb, Joshua, and the elders of their generation had passed away. They themselves had been born in sight of the Jordan, and had always lived in the future. Now they lived in the past, their power for work was over. Seventh, they had lost

their standard. Instead of destroying the rich Canaanite, they had been content to take tribute of him, and the result was that he still existed, and remained a source of danger; no more transitory, but permanent.

In the first bitterness of tears the elders realized that God would no more remove the Canaanite out of the land, in order to strengthen their weak will and lusting heart by successive and continuous struggles. David only became a man because a lion threatened his flock. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, would not have sung, lamented or prophesied, had the times not been evil. And perhaps it was the utter need and helpless hopelessness of the dark world which called the Divine Being to the stable of Nazareth to heal, to satisfy and bless. Perhaps some of the elders realized that God in his infinite Father-heart yearns for the return of the spirits that have once left His breast, that they might find in Him their eternal peace. For this progress, to force them to become better and stronger, even if as though by fire, the Angel of the Lord as he came up from Gilgal decreed the Canaanite should remain for ever in the land, and remain a thorn in their sides, that they might seek their God, and haply find Him in the hour of trouble, if they had not enough faith and love to seek Him in the hour of joy.

II. This narrative is not only history; it is also parable; parable for you, parable for me, parable for to-day; parable for all time.

It is in the first place a very plain parable of practical life. The child new-born has all opportunities before it. The character of education limits the opportunities. Then comes youth, school and recreation. Finally the young man chooses a career. All other opportunities but that are gone. The young man is free to choose a wife from any girl he sees; he chooses; henceforth there is no salvation for him except with that one woman of all

others. Now there is nothing left him to do but to make the best use possible of the circumstances in which he is placed; to intensify work in that one department of all others. Being a chemist, his only hope lies in becoming a good chemist; no other field is open to him; all other opportunities are gone. Lost opportunities cannot be awakened to life again. The weakness, the sin, the ignorance which was not overcome in youth is never overcome before death. At a certain age every man becomes settled in habits of thought and acquisition of knowledge. When that young man became settled in life, he came to Bochim; and many the tears he shed there.

It is in the second place a parable of the way in which God judges man. God is very merciful, but He is just. God gives every man a certain length of time in which to amend or accomplish his task. If he is unsuccessful God gives him a respite; if unsuccessful again, a still shorter further one. After several respites, if not successful, God, with tears in His eyes, judges His wandering child; the opportunities are gone. The end has come. This is just like a man walking across the country and coming to the parting of two ways. Even after he has chosen one way, he may turn back a little bit, and change his choice; but as soon as the roads have separated, he must go on his road, perhaps for miles and over precipices before he can once more join the other, after many delays and deviations.

Bochim is in the third place a parable of hell, that is, of failure. The only real cause of weeping is wasted time; beside this all other causes pale into insignificance. Wasted opportunities, wasted life—how terrible. We are told in the New Testament that Hell is a place of weeping; so is Bochim. Hell is the same as Bochim: it is a time when judgment has gone forth that the opportunities are wasted and the soul is condemned to abide,

like Israel, with the Canaanites around it, for thorns in the flesh, for ever.

Those who have once been in Bochim, in the Valley of Baca, in Hell, never forget it. You can tell them from souls who have not been there by the fact that they never laugh freely again; they always relapse into silence.

The inhabitants of the world may be divided into two great classes. Those who have been in Bochim, and those who have not.

Those who have not been in Bochim are usually the young—and a few, very few, old men. For God's sake take care, O young people, that you do not come to Bochim. Let me remind you that many go in thereat; few there be that come out. If while you are young you do not free yourselves from your sins and weaknesses, they will grow into habits; and the Angel of the Lord will come up from Gilgal to set his face against you, to tell you the Lord has judged you, and that your sins will cleave to you as long as you live. Oh, if you knew the agony of having to bear your sins with you all your life, you would wake up.

I plead not only with the young. I plead with the souls more advanced in years. Take good care of the children, in the Sunday School, in the day-school, in the home, in the play-ground. Teach them early the terrible significance of early self-indulgence and self-gratification. O do not let them be ignorant of the pitfalls of pleasure! O teach them to love duty, and to seek to do it more and more! I beseech you for the young; warn them of Bochim; of the heat, and the bitterness of the tears that are wept there; of the sadness of the life after Bochim; of the weariness of never in this life being able to destroy the habits of the Canaanites from out the land. Have mercy on the children! Love them, teach them, reprove them.

So much for those who have not yet been in Bochim, and who, therefore, need never come there unless it be their fault. But also, what shall we say to the souls who have been in Bochim, and over whom the purple veil of the Will of God rests? Let us not spend time in sentimentality. Lost opportunities are dead, inexorably dead, dead as a door-nail, dead as a body in the dissecting-room. Let us not waste time in dreaming of what might have been. Let us not waste time in weeping. Let us not throw the axe-head away after the handle is broken. Let us not refuse to live because part of our life is wasted. Do not deceive yourselves. Those who have been in Bochim will never be able to catch up for lost time. It is gone, foolishly wasted, dispersed. And the worst of it is, that it has separated us from our loved ones, who have not been in Bochim. What shall be said to them? Shall curses be used? Shall sneers, gibes, reproaches be used? No. Bless and curse not. They have all the punishment they deserve and can bear already. Simply remind them to make the best use possible of what little time remains before the Great Second Advent. Do the best you can to-day, and you will conquer to-morrow. But you will never be able to make up for yesterday. Do the best you can to-day.

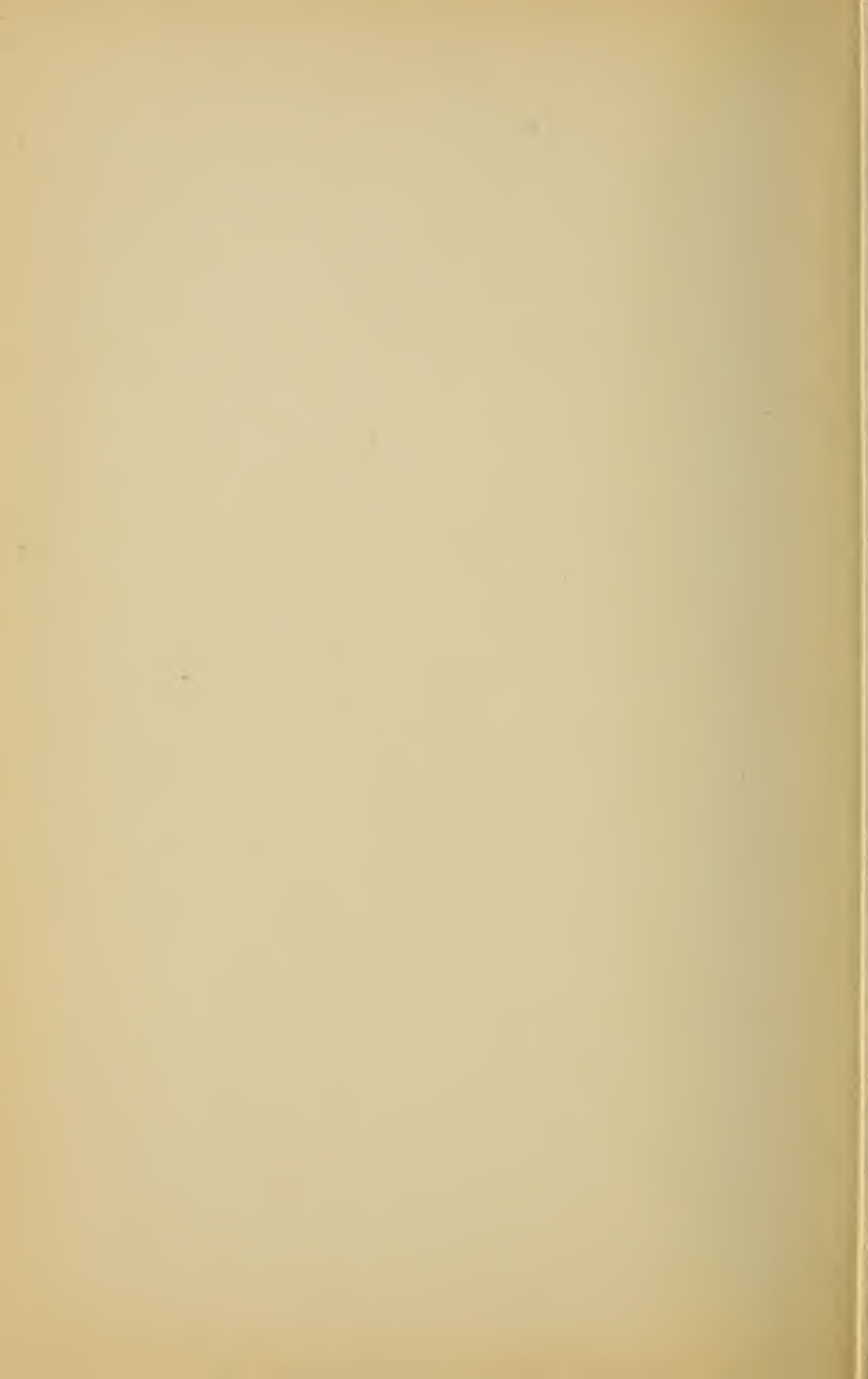
What? Is yesterday lost for ever? Yes; for ever. Are all further opportunities also gone for ever? Is there no hope for those in Hell, in Bochim, in the Valley of the Shadow of Death, to retrieve in the future past errors?

Let me tell you what a wise man whose writings were considered Scripture in the early Church thought on the subject. I am referring to Hermas. Hermas saw a vision (Bk. I, Vis. III. Ch. VII). He saw a tower being built, in which each well-polished stone was a bishop, a presbyter, a deacon, a faithful Christian or a Virgin—chastity being demanded of all. But Hermas saw many

stones rejected by the builders. Hermas asked of his guide: "Is repentance possible for all those stones which have been cast away and did not fit into the building of the tower, and will they yet have a place in this tower?" The guide answered: "Repentance is yet possible, but in this tower they cannot find a suitable place. But in another and much inferior place they will be laid, and that, too, only when they have been tortured—in Bochim, the place of weeping—and have completed the days of their sins. And on this account will they be transferred, because they have partaken of the righteous Logos of God." So we may hope that not in this life, but somewhere beyond, sometime, somewhere, somehow, God will wipe away all tears from the eyes of the souls that have long dwelt in the Shadow of Death, and crown them with a crown of life, and light and peace. But, how long, O Lord, how long must they wait for that!

Beloved brethren, pray for the souls in Bochim!

Pray for the souls that have not yet been in Bochim, that they may never see that place of weeping, that the Angel of the Lord may never come up against them from Gilgal, may never force them to dwell all the days of their life chained down to the sins of their youth. Pray, pray for them, my beloved brethren, before the great Coming of the Second Advent!





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